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Faces of Evil: the FIENDS



by Colin McComb



THE FIENDS

♦ THE FIENDS ♦

*Being an Accounting of the Vilest creatures of the Lower Planes,
the Ways of their creation, the Means by which they survive,
and the Manner in which they conduct their dark Affairs.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
The Nature of Evil	5
What Makes a Fiend a Fiend	6
Plane of Origin	6
Immortality	6
Gender	7
Clueless Slurs	7
True Names	7
The Blood War	7
Going to the Prime	8
Summoning the Fiends	9
A Final Word	9
Acknowledgements	9
THE BAATEZU	10
Origin of the Species	12
Up From the Muck	12
Modern Evolution	12
Fleeting Memory	13
Station to Station	13
Least Baatezu	13
Lesser Baatezu	14
Greater Baatezu	16
The Process of Promotion	17
Methods	17
Rising to Power	17
Demotions	18
The Pit of Flame	19
Bodily Form and Functions	19
Parts	19
Gender	20
Birth	20
Nourishment	20
Sleep and Dreams	21
Powers	22
Alterations	22
Weaknesses	23
Physical Vulnerabilities	24
Spiritual Vulnerabilities	25
The True Death	25
Banishment	25
Summoning the Baatezu	26
How to Call Them	27
How to Control Them	27
Dealing With Mortals	28
The Dark Eight	29
Noble Baatezu	29
The Lords of the Nine	30
Lord of the First	30
Lord of the Second	30
Lord of the Third	30
Lord of the Fourth	31
Lord of the Fifth	31
Lord of the Sixth	32
Lord of the Seventh	32
Lord of the Eighth	32
Lord of the Ninth	32
Chaos and Purity	32
The Rogues and the Risen	33
A Society of Betrayal	34
Language	35
The Castes of Speech	35
Culture	35
Architecture	36
Art	36
Economy	36
Education	36
Government	37
History	37
Military	37
Religion	37
In Summary	37
The City of Man	38
THE TANAR'RI	40
In the Abyss	42
Creation and Judgment	42
Chaos Is Not Stupidity	43
An Endless Variety	43
Evolution of Form	43
Rankings	44
Least Tanar'ri	44
Lesser Tanar'ri	44
Greater Tanar'ri	45
True Tanar'ri	46
Guardian Tanar'ri	47
Ascension	48
Traitors	48
Bodily Form and Functions	48
Physical Attributes	49
Gender	49
Procreation	49
Sustenance	50
Rest and Respite	50
Powers	50
Vulnerabilities	51
Making Dead Stay Dead	51
Dealing with Mortals	53
Summoning the Tanar'ri	53
Arcane Sources	53
Spreading the Word	54
Communication	55

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Culture of Chaos .....	.55
Character .....	.56
Aesthetics .....	.56
Society .....	.56
Laws .....	.57
Getting What You Want .....	.57
Posturing .....	.58
Parasites of Power .....	.58
Abyssal Lords .....	.58
Alvarez .....	.60
Eldanoth .....	.60
Fraz Urblu .....	.60
Lupercio .....	.60
Lynkhab .....	.61
Pale Night .....	.61
Verin .....	.62
Abyssal Princes .....	.62
Controlling a Layer .....	.62
Prosecuting the Blood War .....	.63
In Summary .....	.63
Mal Arundak: The City of Confusion .....	.63
 THE YUGOLOTHS .....	.66
The Lies of Truth .....	.68
In the Beginning .....	.69
The Truest Fiends .....	.69
The Shapes of Evil .....	.70
Yugoloth Creations .....	.70
Lesser Yugoloths .....	.70
Greater Yugoloths .....	.70
The Oinoloth .....	.71
Baernaloths .....	.71
Promotion and Purification .....	.72
Rogue Yugoloths .....	.72
Bodily Form and Functions .....	.73
Gender .....	.73
Birth .....	.74
Nourishment .....	.74
Rest and Recovery .....	.74
Powers .....	.75
Disposing of a Yugoloth .....	.75
Dealing With Mortals .....	.76
Summoning Yugoloths .....	.76
Language .....	.77
Culture and Society .....	.77
Essential Beliefs .....	.77
Politics and Caste .....	.78
Manipulation .....	.79
In Summary .....	.79
The Tower of Incarnate Pain .....	.80
 THE GEHRELETHS .....	.82
The Legend of Apomps .....	.83
Physiology .....	.84
The Triad .....	.84
Population Count .....	.84
Gender and Birth .....	.85
Rest and Nourishment .....	.85
Powers .....	.85
Mortality .....	.85
Gehreleth Society .....	.86
Promotions .....	.86
Obsidian Triangles .....	.86
Summoning a Gehreleth .....	.87
Dealing with Mortals .....	.87
In Summary .....	.87
 OTHERS .....	.88
Bodaks .....	.89
Physiology .....	.90
Society and Culture .....	.90
Meeting a Bodak .....	.90
Hordlings .....	.91
Physiology .....	.91
Society and Culture .....	.91
Meeting a Hordling .....	.91
Imps and Quasits .....	.91
Physiology .....	.92
Society and Culture .....	.92
Meeting an Imp or Quasit .....	.93
Larvae .....	.93
Physiology .....	.93
Society and Culture .....	.93
Night Hags .....	.94
Physiology .....	.94
Society and Culture .....	.94
Meeting a Night Hag .....	.95
Shadow Fiends .....	.95
Physiology .....	.95
Society and Culture .....	.95
Meeting a Shadow Fiend .....	.96
Tieflings .....	.96
Physiology .....	.96
Society and Culture .....	.96

INTRODUCTION

So. You've made it this far, my friend, and you think you've got the hang of the fiends. You think you can run circles 'round one, bobbing it and giving it the laugh. You think that fiends are basically humans in funny suits, with a bent toward the dark side. You think you've got all the answers.

It ain't true, berk, it ain't true. Really understanding a fiend means a lot more than just knowing how many lumps it'll take before it falls down. Even knowing all the different lumps a fiend can give you isn't enough. Too many bashers see the fiends as nothing but targets or murder machines. And even those who make an effort to dig deeper haven't come close to unearthing the whole truth. No matter who you are, berk, there's so much more to the fiends than you know, and if you think that what little chant you've got means you understand them intimately, well, you're in for a rude awakening one of these days.

This book just might help you avoid that fate.

It hasn't got all the answers. First, it skips over a lot of numbers you can pick up elsewhere, like exactly how much damage it takes to kill a gelugon (or a marilith or yagnoloth or whatever). But in these pages, you'll find most of the known details of the lower-planar races, along with plenty of secrets that were previously left dark. You'll find the basics of what makes a fiend a fiend. What separates 'em from all the rest of the multiverse. What separates 'em from each other. What they eat. How they reproduce. How they die. What makes 'em fight (or flee) the Blood War.

More importantly, though, this book has the keys to unlocking the fiendish mind. After all, the creatures can think just like you and me (well, most of 'em can, anyway). They've got hierarchies of strength and status. They form societies out of alliances and betrayals. They build cultures of art and architecture and education. And most important of all, they base their lives on waves of belief that're designed to wash 'em into power. Trust me — just as with the rest of the Outer Planes, it's belief that really sets the fiends apart and makes them the terrors of small children and grown adults alike.

One more thing. All the while I was compiling this book, folks warned me that it'd be a wasted effort, that no cutter in his right mind'd give it more than a moment's attention. Why? Because I'm a tiefling. There. I've said it. Now get over it. Sure, I've got fiendish blood running through my veins — maybe bucketloads, maybe just a few drops. I don't even know where it comes from. And that's part of the reason I pushed myself to do this book in the first place. I figure that by learning all I can about the fiends, I just might come to terms with my own heritage. See where I've come from, maybe see where I'm going. Find my place in the multiverse.

Is that selfish? Maybe. But the knowledge is here now, for the benefit of all. And now that you know the dark of how it came to be, maybe you won't dismiss it out of hand. But it's your life, berk. Do with it what you like.

The introductory chapter is mine. The rest are presented by others. But I've taken the liberty of making the final decision on what chant stays and what goes. So if you find something that's wrong in these pages, blame me. Just remember me when something's right.

— Ice the Thrice-Born

AN EDITOR'S TASK
IS A +HANKLESS ONE.
FOR THIS BOOK,
IT'S MORALLY PERILOUS. +B+.
— NEMO+O SINH

THE NATURE ◆ OF EVIL ◆

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of the flends, we need to tackle a much bigger question: What is evil? Sure, most folks think they know evil when they see it, but stop reading for just a moment and try to come up with a definition.

Chances are that no two of you came up with the *same* definition. Know what that means? Evil is different things to different people. I started a few folks talking on this subject at the Civic Festhall in Sigil. Here's a bit of an exchange I overheard between a bariaur (a Sensate, I believe) and a githzerai:

Bariaur: Evil? That's simple. Evil is trying to ruin and destroy, trying to return the multiverse to a state of nothingness.

Githzerai: Feh! Sounds like the Doomguard to me, and some o' those bashers're as virtuous as a solar.

B: Well, what I really meant was trampling anything that gets in your way.

G: Oh, yeah? Let me tell you 'bout this little thing called the Modron March. Seems these critters – neutral, by the way – stomp their way around the Great Ring, runnin' over whatever's in their path.

B: All right, then. Evil is selfishness – concern for nothing and no one but yourself. Thinkin' that –

G: Hold it right there, berk. I belong to the Fated. And I don't care about you, your friends, or anything else but gettin' ahead in the cosmos. That ain't evil. That's just knowing how to help yourself.



B: Fine! Evil is – it's trying to limit the freedoms of those around you, trying to force everyone else to do things the way *you* think they should be done.

G: Now you've pegged the Harmonium. You willin' to go tell a Hardhead that you think he's wicked? Come to think of it, what you just said applies to most cutters on the Upper Planes, too. Here comes a deva now. Why don't I –

B: Enough, you rascal! I'll tell you what evil is! It's inflicting grievous harm on others – whether physical suffering or mental strife – without just cause.

G: Ah, you mean like the Lady? No one knows what makes her flay a berk or stick him in the Mazes or just leave him alone, do they? Most smart Cagers figure that means she's as neutral as they come.

They were still arguing when I left. I've got no idea if they ever settled on an answer. But the point is that no matter how you define evil, there'll always be a berk who can poke holes in your theory. Does that mean we can never figure out what's evil and what ain't? No, it just means that there are different *kinds* of evil.

Take the three main races of fiends; they all act very differently. If a baatezu captured a mortal, it'd probably lock him up in a dungeon and try to corrupt his soul through cruel discipline. A yugoloth'd turn the mortal into a puppet, exploit him for all he was worth, then savor the despairing moment when the sod realizes he was used. A tanar'i would probably just rip the sod's head off.

Is one fiend more evil than the others? Depends on who you ask. Some might consider a quick death more merciful than prolonged torment. Some might think oblivion is much, much worse. Now, I'm not going to say which fiends I think are the most evil. That's a fool's game. But I *will* say what *I* think "evil" is: being willfully, maliciously, pointedly indifferent to the needs of others, just for the sake of *doing* it, not because you necessarily have anything to gain from it.

Don't agree? You don't have to. But as you're reading the rest of this book, try to work on your own definition of evil. Keep it tucked somewhere in the back of your head, and see if what's there when you're done is the same thing you had when you started.

WHAT MAKES ♦ A FIEND A FIEND ♦

Chant on the streets is that a fiend is simply a basher that's given itself over to the pursuit of evil, a berk with strange looks, unfathomable goals, and tremendous powers.

That's for the small-minded. Fiends are, to tell the truth, more than physical beings. They're born of evil – or, as some would have it, of *Evil*. Primal malevolence is one of the roots of their nature. 'Course, that doesn't mean all fiends are on the same level of power. A glabrezu can have a manes for breakfast, obviously, and it might even have another glabrezu, too. Whether that's due to individual achievement (meaning the glabrezu struggled like mad to

get where it is) or chalked up to a quirk of nature (meaning some fiends're just born tougher than others), the truth of the matter is that all fiends're formed and shaped by their environment. They're planars in the truest sense of the word. The hateful essence of the Lower Planes permeates every piece of a fiend's body. As creatures of the Outer Planes, they're partly made up of the *belief* of those planes.

So can fiends be affected by the beliefs of others? No doubt about it. That's what the whole Blood War's all about – the struggle to determine which philosophy of evil deserves to reign over the Lower Planes. It's part of how they ascend through their various hierarchies, and it's why they're affected by the summonings and spells of mortals.

The real question, of course, is how an ordinary mortal can influence a fiend through the power of belief. Well, it's been said that belief is all that sustains a paladin's aura or the strength of a priest's wards. In other words, the power of their belief in their deity – their faith in the holy protection offered – is what keeps fiends away. But that ain't enough. The wards function because there's something of the god in them. See, mere faith isn't enough to cut it – a mortal berk just can't *think* away a tanar'i that's about to rip him to pieces. The fiends are children of substance as well as belief (though not nearly as much as mortals are).

Naturally, plenty of other factors go into the making of a fiend.

PLANE OF ORIGIN

Strictly speaking – and this is meant for all you bean-counters and Guvner-wannabees out there – a fiend is an evil creature from one of the Lower Planes. If it comes from anywhere else, it ain't a fiend. Period.

On the other hand, not everything that comes from the Lower Planes is a fiend. Plenty of vile creatures come from the bottom of the Great Ring. Some of them even have the word "fiend" built right into their names, like the shadow fiend. But they're not fiends. Fact is, only five different races of creatures can rightly be called "fiends": the baatezu, the tanar'i, the yugoloths, the gehreleths, and the hordlings. That doesn't mean more won't be discovered or reclassified in the future, but for now, that's it.

IMMORTALITY

Nobody knows how long a fiend lives. Chant is they're immortal, and it's certainly not dark that, like dragons, they grow more powerful with time. Some, like the yugoloths' General of Gehenna and the baatezu's Dark Eight, are thought to have led their races forever. 'Course, fiends aren't invulnerable; they can be killed just like any other creature. But are they truly immortal otherwise? Does their evil just keep on raging unless their lives are unnaturally halted?

How can I know, berk? How can anyone? We won't be around to see if any fiends make it from the first breath of the multiverse to the last. The powers might know the answer to the question, but they're not telling. (And why

should they? Do you feel any great need to make a worm understand whether a flea's mortal or not?)

On the other hand, most folks assume that fiends are, indeed, immortal. It's the safest guess, and besides, no one's ever seen a fiend grow old or die of "natural causes." See, the fiends may *grow*, but they don't grow *older* — that is, they don't mature. Plenty of fiends can mate and produce smaller versions of themselves that get bigger and stronger as the years roll on. But the offspring aren't aging, just developing until they reach a certain point (usually called "adulthood" by mortals). Likewise, when a fiend earns a promotion in the ranks and gets reshaped into a completely different kind of creature, it's not growing or aging. It's just changing.

The whole question doesn't make much difference, anyway. Even if the fiends aren't immortal, their lives're undeniably, fantastically long — long enough to give 'em a perspective few others on the planes can achieve. Fiends quickly pick up on the idea of patience; a century is as nothing to them. From a mortal's point of view, the fiends effectively have forever to cook up new schemes for violence or revenge.

In the end, there's really only one way to know if the fiends' immortal. First, figure out how to become immortal yourself. (That's the easy part.) Second, capture a fiend alive, lock it in a magically warded cell, and make sure it doesn't get out. (That's a good deal harder.) And third, sit back and wait. If the fiend eventually dies, you'll know it wasn't immortal. But if you're both still sitting there at the end of time, you'll know that it was. Hope the answer's worth the trouble.

GENDER

As you're reading through the rest of this book, you might notice that some of the contributors tend to call a fiend a *him*. Some like to call a fiend a *her*. And most of 'em prefer to call it an *it*. Sometimes, even the selfsame writer slides back and forth from "him" to "her" to "it." But that's only because many fiends tend to do the same (as you'll learn in later chapters). No sense locking ourselves into a certain style when the fiends don't follow suit.

The larger issue, though, is just what's the difference between a male and female fiend? I doubt one mortal out of a thousand could look at a balar and tell its gender, if it even has one. It's not like the females wear dresses, and they don't have the same kind of telltale glands mortals use to nurse their young. (Fiends aren't mammals, after all.) Sure, sometimes males and females might exhibit signs of gender, like slight variations in horns, scales, or pupils. But the main difference is in their internal organs. Males sire children. Females bear 'em. And that's it.

"Course, that won't make any difference to the average berk — not unless a fiend's set on mating with him. And he'd better pray that it never comes to that."

CLUELESS SLURS

We've all gotten plenty of laughs out of the fact that bashers from the Prime Material Plane call some of our planes by

the wrong names. "Nine Hells," "Nirvana," "Gladsheim" — talk about being provincial! Well, the Clueless didn't just stop with the Outer Planes. They gave their own backwater names to various planar races, too, including — you guessed it — the fiends. I won't repeat those names here. Sure, Sigil sees its share of primes who still insist on using 'em, but the joke's on them. It makes 'em look as ignorant and foolish as they probably are. And it irks the fiends something fierce.

TRUE NAMES

Within the breast of every being, so it's said, there's a space that echoes to some feature of the cosmos, a sound that sums up the being's desires, hates, fate, and most hidden self. This is called the *true name* or the *secret name*, and it's no dark that the fiends hide theirs as best they can. True names, as any student of the occult arts could tell you, are the most powerful form of binding known.

A fiend's true name is what allows it to be summoned by a mortal or enslaved by a superior. See, the spoken name is the total summation of the fiend's essence, and the blood who utters it twists the desires of the fiend so that it's got no choice but to respond. The speaking of the name — along with certain rituals, offerings, or threats — can summon the creature from across the planes against its will. And once the summoner's called a fiend, he can use the *true name* spell to do it great harm. That's why fiends constantly try to dig up the secret names of their enemies — so they can pass the names on to mortals, who can then punish the named fiends or bind them into service.

Naturally, it ain't easy to discover a fiend's true name. They keep 'em dark till the day they die, and they do their best to destroy any records of their names that somehow make it into books. Chant is a fiend might not even know its own true name, or might have the knowledge of it stolen away by enemies. This is particularly brutal on the berks. See, mortals hardly ever tumble to their own true names, but fiends *need* to know themselves to get ahead. If they're deprived of that, it keeps 'em from ascending as quickly as they'd like.

Some bloods have it that a fiend's secret name changes completely when it's promoted to the next level in its hierarchy. More likely, the name evolves with the fiend, changing only as much as the creature does. At its core, the name probably stays the same — just with a few additions. A fiend called by an old version of its true name isn't bound nearly as well, and it'll delight in showing the summoner just how free it is.

THE BLOOD WAR

Folks say the fiends wouldn't be complete without the Blood War to provide a focus for their ire, that the creatures exist to define the face of evil through their actions. Well, true or not, the fiends certainly act like that's the case. They bend the bulk of their will and resources toward crushing their enemies and trying to make sure that their own views prevail. They use any means at their disposal to drive out their foes or manipulate 'em to their own ends (as you'll learn in later chapters).

Now, it's true that not *all* fiends spend their entire lives focused on the Blood War. The hordlings aren't involved, the gehreleths try to avoid it entirely, and the yugoloths seem to work for one side just as easily as the other. The baatezu and tanar'i keep the fires of war burning, but not even all of them care all that much. Still, any fiend that hopes to make a name for itself'd better consider how it's going to deal with the fighting.

The Blood War troubles mortals in more ways than one. Obviously, the battles raz lands and kill innocents. But they also wipe out so many fiends that the baatezu and tanar'i have had to figure out how to replenish their numbers more rapidly. What they did was learn how to twist larvae into lemures and manes. They also tumbled to the fact that larvae form on the Lower Planes when evil mortals die. Any berk who can put two and two together can see what happened next: The fiends began to corrupt mortals in order to get more larvae.

GOING + THE ◆ PRIME ◆

From a fiend's point of view, mortals are dung and vermin. That doesn't mean they're useless, though. The fiends discovered the Prime long ago, and they've used mortals in their schemes ever since.

From the perspective of a fiend, a mortal's life span is pitifully short. This grants the creatures extraordinary insight into mortal character, though they often have to wait until they're fairly high-powered before they can put this knowledge to use. See, weaker fiends

don't usually deal with mortals, and besides, they've got to gather the wisdom before they can use it. But when they begin to use that knowledge . . . berk, that's another story. I've heard there's no mortal reaction that surprises a high-up fiend, not even from Xaositects. Chant is that fiends play mortals like gut-harps.

'Course, all this begs the question: Why do fiends give a fig about mortals in the first place? Well, as already stated, they count on the sods as future fodder for the Blood War. Erinyes, glabrezu, succubi and others try to tempt and corrupt mortals over to their side, so that when the berks die they end up on the "proper" Lower Plane. Sometimes, the fiends just snatch living mortals and drag them back home for use as slaves, mercenaries, or foodstuffs. And sometimes, they just like to play with 'em, as a cat torments a mouse before the kill.

Fiends also use the worlds of the Prime as battlegrounds or bolt-holes for the Blood War. Most of the Outer Planes are too well defended by the natives — modrons, aasimor, guardinals, or whatever — to let the fiends grab much of a toehold. But, rightly or wrongly, the creatures see the Clueless as pushovers, and they bring their battles to prime-material worlds without a care.

Most of all, though, the Prime is a wellspring of faith. The Outer Planes run on belief, and, as we've already seen, the fiends thrive on it. So if the creatures journey to the Prime and convince

the Clueless to fear and respect them, they gain the strength of that belief. That alone is reason enough to terrorize mortals on the Prime.

Lesser Calling

5th-level wizard spell; conjuration/summoning

Range: 10 yards
Duration: Special
Area of Effect: 1 creature

Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1d4 hours
Saving Throw: None

This spell allows a wizard to summon a minor fiend from the Lower Planes without knowing the fiend's true name. A successful casting ages the wizard by six months. Three rounds after the spell is cast, one of the following fiends appears in the wizard's location:

D20 ROLL	FIEND
1-4	Guardian yugoloth (least)
5-6	Black abishai
7-8	Armanite
9	Osyluth
10-13	Hordling (6+3 HD only)
14	Barbazu
15-16	Bar-Igura
17-18	Canoloth
19	Buleczu
20	Farastu gehreleth

Before casting the spell, the wizard can construct a warding circle in which to trap the creature. If he succeeds, he can try to demand service in exchange for the fiend's freedom. Most fiends won't perform any service that takes longer than 24 hours to complete; only guardian yugoloths are able to serve longer. Once the fiend agrees to a deal, it must complete the terms of the bargain to the best of its ability before returning to the Lower Planes. Of course, if the fiend can violate the intent of the agreement while sticking to the letter of the deal, it will, but *lesser calling* brings only creatures of low to middling Intelligence — not the kind well known for their clever trickery.

If the wizard's warding circle is faulty, or if he doesn't prepare a circle at all, the fiend is free to do as it pleases from the moment it arrives. (Later chapters in *Faces of Evil* give details on how various fiends react to being summoned.) If it so chooses, the creature can remain on the wizard's plane for up to a year, at which time it's drawn back to the Lower Planes.

The material components for this spell are an animal's collar, a handful of soil from cursed ground, and a sheet of parchment made from the skin of any outer-planar being.

For details on constructing warding circles and bargaining with summoned creatures, refer to the 6th-level wizard spell *ensnarement* in the AD&D® Player's Handbook.

◆ SUMMONING +HE FIENDS◆

Why a berk'd want to summon a fiend is beyond me, but since there's no shortage of fools willing to try, I figured I'd better give a quick rundown on the best methods of doing it and what to expect from each. Later chapters in this book look specifically at calling the main types of fiends. The chant below's just a general overview.

First of all, it depends on whether or not you know the true name of the fiend to be summoned. If you don't — and most spellcasters *don't* — you're stuck with casting *lesser calling*, which sorely limits what you can get (see the spell description on this page spread). It's theoretically possible that a very high-level *monster summoning* spell will call a more powerful fiend, but since you won't know the creature's true name, I'd advise against trying.

If, on the other hand, you know a specific fiend's true name, you can try to call it to your plane with *gate*, *ensnarement*, or *cacofield*. These spells can net higher-ranking baatezu, tanar'i, and yugoloths. But take care how you do it. After all, *gate* merely opens a doorway to the named fiend; it can step through or toss a minion through in its place. And whatever shows up is pretty much free to do whatever it likes.

With *ensnarement* and *cacofield*, a blood can bind the summoned fiend in a warding circle — or, more accurately, he can try. If he does it right, the creature's trapped until it agrees to perform a service (or until it figures out how to get free). 'Course, enslaving a fiend like this won't do much to make the creature happy.

No doubt there are plenty of magical items and other methods of calling fiends from the Lower Planes. But these're the best known and most widely used. To me, that means they *work* the best. So if you must summon a fiend, stick to what you can count on.



◆ A FINAL WORD ◆

Lest a body think that all fiends are alike, let me say that this chapter presents only superficial similarities. Though it's been suggested that all fiends sprang from one primal source, they're incredibly different in their outlooks and goals. The rest of *Faces of Evil* lays those differences bare. We've even dug up the dark on a baatezu city, a tanar'i burg, and a yugoloth tower; that chant appears (along with maps) at the ends of each of the three main chapters.

And for those of you who still need to know how tall a fiend is, what kind of morale it has, or how hard it is to kill, we've included references to other books that specialize in that kind of chant. These "Other Sources" appear in each chapter, telling you where to go to learn more about each type of creature.

◆ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ◆

Some of what's in these pages is undeniably true; some of it's just as likely barmy nonsense. With reports gathered from every nook and cranny of the planes, it's hard to separate fact from fiction, truth from lies. Powers know just how much the fiends like their deceits; it's taken much time and effort to sort through our collected knowledge. See, this tome's a compilation of the findings of researchers and bloods all over the multiverse. Though I'd like to take credit for all of it, I can't. I'm just the ultimate compiler of what's here. As you're reading the book, you'll no doubt notice that different reports're credited to different people. Let's give 'em their due.

Nomoto Slink, my good mage friend, is as friendly and dedicated a scholar as they come. He edited the chapter on the baatezu. Assisting him were: *Rezzik Tam*, a half-orc from the Prime, whose hatred of the baatezu is evident; the half-elf *Teala Wilton*, who certainly delivered the goods (despite her arrogance and her tendency to be a fiend apologist); and *Regnus Roy*, a human basher and Sigil native who tends to tell it like it is.

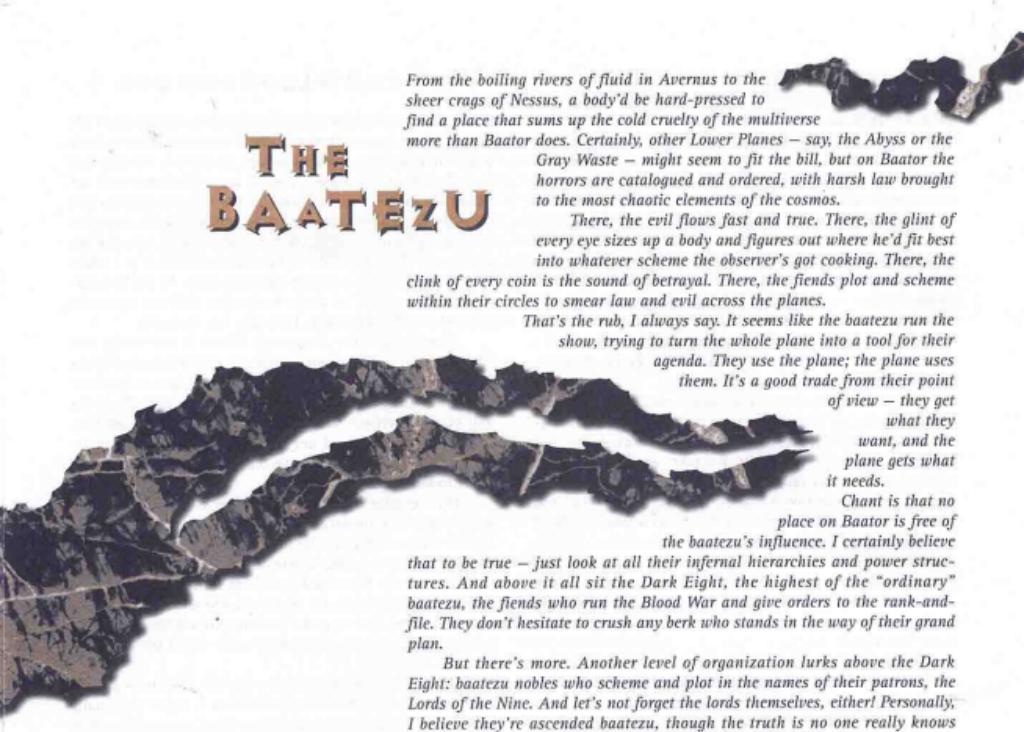
The compiler of the tanar'i chapter is *Jessyme Rauch*, a serious and straight-laced rogue. On her team were: *Michil Kedell*, a cheerful and talkative dwarf; the cranky bariaur *Telson Splithorn*, whose motivations ran a bit deeper than the rest; and the blue slaad known as *Xanrost*, who — well, who's a slaad. That says it best. I tried to arrange Xanrost's points in some kind of order and weed out most of its confusing asides, but its personality still shines through (for better or for worse).

The mastermind behind the yugoloth chapter — a githzerai with a sometimes doleful outlook — asked to remain anonymous, signing his pieces only as *The Unnamed*. He didn't want to be linked to all the secrets spilled about the yugoloths. Those assisting him, the old tiefling *Enkillo the Sly* and the well-spoken lupinal *Mowatt Ke'Mahn*, weren't so discreet. Unfortunately, much of the chapter is suspect. I have reason to believe that one of the three researchers — though I don't know which — is a disguised 'loth spy. Think I'm paranoid? With the yugoloths, a body can never be too careful.

The gehreleth chapter was a good deal easier. The whole thing was pulled together by *Carlivan Everhaite*, a drow wizard from the Prime. A few of you might've read his previous book on gehreleths, *The Three Bodies of Evil*. It's what made me tap him for this job.

Finally, the chapter that covers other assorted fiendish creatures was a group effort. I asked some of my contributors to do double duty and write a short piece on bodaks, night hags, or whatever else needed attention.

Sadly, not all of the bloods I just named are still with us. I lost some good people making this volume, and not all of 'em were lost to death. Some went to fates far, far worse. But I'm not naming any names here. I don't want the chant they dug up to be tainted or overshadowed by their fates. See, we made sacrifices in the name of truth so that you wouldn't have to. The least you could do now is put our collected wisdom to good use.



THE BAATEZU

From the boiling rivers of fluid in Avernum to the sheer crags of Nessus, a body'd be hard-pressed to find a place that sums up the cold cruelty of the multiverse more than Baator does. Certainly, other Lower Planes — say, the Abyss or the

Gray Waste — might seem to fit the bill, but on Baator the horrors are catalogued and ordered, with harsh law brought to the most chaotic elements of the cosmos.

There, the evil flows fast and true. There, the glint of every eye sizes up a body and figures out where he'd fit best into whatever scheme the observer's got cooking. There, the clink of every coin is the sound of betrayal. There, the fiends plot and scheme within their circles to smear law and evil across the planes.

That's the rub, I always say. It seems like the baatezu run the show, trying to turn the whole plane into a tool for their agenda. They use the plane; the plane uses them. It's a good trade from their point of view — they get what they want, and the plane gets what it needs.

Chant is that no place on Baator is free of

the baatezu's influence. I certainly believe that to be true — just look at all their infernal hierarchies and power structures. And above it all sit the Dark Eight, the highest of the "ordinary" baatezu, the fiends who run the Blood War and give orders to the rank-and-file. They don't hesitate to crush any berk who stands in the way of their grand plan.

But there's more. Another level of organization lurks above the Dark Eight: baatezu nobles who scheme and plot in the names of their patrons, the Lords of the Nine. And let's not forget the lords themselves, either! Personally, I believe they're ascended baatezu, though the truth is no one really knows where they came from. Supposedly, the lords are about on the same level as the powers, but they've not defined themselves either way as of yet. Regardless, they're said to embody the layers they rule over, and if they do keep more of a disinterested eye on the baatezu, it's only natural that they'd show the fiends just about all the secret corners of the plane.

Now, for all their talk about wanting only a multiverse a body can understand, about bringing order to the chaotic and strength to the weak, here's the dark of it: The baatezu are in this existence only for themselves.

They make tortuous rules, nearly as tortuous as

their very lives, and their mazes of logic leave even

the Fraternity of Order baffled at times.

This chapter offers what chant my team and I have gathered on the baatezu. But I think the real key to understanding them lies in tumbling to the Rule of Threes. The fiends' home plane has nine (three times three) layers. The race is divided into three main castes: least, lesser, and greater. The hierarchy of their society involves three rankings of power: ordinary fiends, the nobles, and the Lords of the Nine.

See, the lives of the baatezu are governed by the known principles of the multiverse, in ways that've been rearranged for their convenience. Certainly, it's no easy task to sum up the race, and perhaps no one will ever manage it. But we believe the answers are there. We must keep trying.

— Nomoto Sinh, Compiler-in-Chief

CUT A DEAL
WITH THE BAATEZU?
NO, THANKS.
I'D RATHER CUT MY THROAT.
— TARSHEVA LONGREACH,
EXPERIENCED PLANEWALKER



ADAM
REX

◆ ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES ◆

Rezzik Tam

I've studied the baatezu form and function for a good fifty years, uncovering secrets left hidden for centuries, even millennia. Ever since my family and my tribe were sold into fiendish slavery when a filthy cornugon invoked a small-print clause in a forgotten contract, it's been a driving passion for me to understand the baatezu, and, in understanding them, perhaps lend aid to others whose missions are not so peaceful.

I'll kick off this chapter with a look at three aspects of their dark origins: where the first baatezu came from, where they come from today, and their unfortunate persistence of memory.

UP FROM THE MUCK

First, their origin. Unfortunately, it's dark as to how the baatezu arose. Their own texts say they were born from the churning will of Baator, their forms and functions spelled out as they stepped forth from the mathematics of evil. Over time, they claim, they've changed to better carry out the will of their instincts and logic. But they don't call it change. For them, it's *adaptation*, a process of forcing the multiverse to bend slowly to them. Regardless, the baatezu would like us to believe that their race has existed since the dawn of the planes, at least coexistent with the birth of any of the other planar races, and certainly predating a good majority of them.

Hah! You'll see soon enough why that's not true. But if you'll listen to one lying fiend, I suppose you'll listen to others, so I might as well tell you that the tanar'ri claim that *they* came first. I've read "histories" of the Abyss, and they all agree on only one point: The baatezu are simply twisted representations of the tanar'ri themselves, a chaotic root that was corrupted beyond corruption into the most hated twist of all — order.

The yugoloths also lay claim to being the oldest of all the lower-planar races. 'Course, they back it up with *their* carefully preserved papers and letters and books. I trust these fiends least of all. But they aren't as strident about their pap as the tanar'ri or the baatezu; the yugoloths make their case quietly and let it rest at that.

Regardless of the tales the others tell, the baatezu's history doesn't have much bearing on their present. The baatezu, though they respect their history enough to pay it lip service in ritual and commemoration, prefer to focus on the future, on what could be. Though they're law-bound and orderly (and few would call them dreamers), the monsters have grand designs for the future of the planes. Thus, the

most important feature of their lives is how the plane and their individual pasts shape them.

MODERN EVOLUTION

It's no dark that the baatezu evolve from the spirits of mortals slain across the planes — specifically, mortals who tended toward law and evil throughout their miserable lives. When these wretches die, they become petitioners and are pulled to the ultimate plane of lawful evil: Baator. Those who worshiped Set, Kurtulmak, or any other power of the plane reform in the realm of their god, taking whatever horrid shape most pleases the deity.

Still, whatever their new body, it's most likely better than the alternative. Mortals who didn't revere any Baatorian deities reform somewhere on the plane as wriggling larvae. And from there, it's survival of the fittest. Hordes of larvae struggle to the death against harsh conditions: vile predators, and each other. Baatezu troll the layers for the hardest larvae, the ones that learn to survive and prosper, and they

mold the things into lemures. The fiends choose only the best of the best, reshaping perhaps a dozen larvae out of every hundred thousand. (The rest are eaten, destroyed, or subjected to any number of heinous fates.) They also buy choice larvae from night hags,

who claim to sell only the finest. Regardless, when a larva becomes a lemure, it sheds its petitionerhood and is considered a true planar being — a baatezu.

What few folks know is that this *isn't* the natural way of things — at least, not the way things started on the

plane. Long, long ago, before the first baatezu ever saw the light of day, Baator was home to a race of powerful, unknown creatures. The larvae of the plane (which weren't born from mortal spirits, as there weren't any mortals yet) all evolved into the fleshy fiends known as nupperibos, which were the young of the mysterious race.

Well, by the time the baatezu came along, most of the ancient Baatorians'd vanished or simply hidden themselves away. But the larvae still grew into nupperibos. 'Course, the baatezu tried to put a stop to that by molding the larvae into lemures — the "young" of *their* race. And it's still going on today. If left alone on the plains of Baator long enough, larvae naturally spawn nupperibos. So the lawful fiends gather up all the larvae they can find and turn 'em into lemures instead.

They also herd wandering nupperibos and "demote" them to the status of lemure so they can join the baatezu race. But it's all a peel. The process isn't a *demotion* at all;

it's a reshaping for selfish purposes, plain and simple. The baatezu don't want to take the chance that the nupperibos might one day evolve into stronger members of the ancient Baatorian race. So they steal the fat fiends and force them into their own twisted hierarchy.

It's the supreme example of the baatezu imposing order – *their* order – over the essential chaos of life. Even the winnowing of the larvae showcases their love of law. The fiends let the brutal process of natural selection catapult the toughest larvae to the top of the heap. The choice isn't arbitrary or subject to bad judgment – only the most capable larvae survive to become lemures.

Not all baatezu grow from larvae and nupperibos, though. Some just pull themselves fully formed from the unfeeling order of Baator itself. But, as a body might suspect, that's a tough trick in a place as structured and regulated as Baator – the baatezu don't just spring up like weeds. Still, the fiends can't produce offspring by mating (as will be discussed later), so they have only two ways to replenish their race: appear spontaneously or evolve from larvae.

Course, baatezu aren't stuck in a single form all their lives. They can grow in power and rise through the ranks of their race; later my editor will present a discussion of the hierarchy of their shapes and promotions. For now, just understand that the monsters assume new abilities with each change in rank and undergo full physical transformations. Even their spirits are altered (though only slightly).

Their memories, unfortunately, remain intact.

FLEETING MEMORY

An old fool I met in Sigil swore that he kept stealing from one particular baatezu by using the same trick on each of the fiend's incarnations – because the monster couldn't remember the ruse from one body to the next.

Hah! I don't have the space to explain how many different ways that berk was a liar. The important point here is that baatezu *do* remember the time they spent in previous forms. If they didn't, they'd lose the hard-earned knowledge accumulated throughout their centuries in the lower ranks. Even more to the point, they wouldn't be able to anticipate the schemes of their inferiors (and that skill is one of their most finely tuned instincts, seeing as it keeps them alive).

Now, it's no dark that as mortals grow older, they accumulate experience and knowledge. It's no different for the baatezu (though they don't grow older; they just keep on living). Of course, since the monsters live for so much longer than ordinary people, their collected experience is a veritable treasure-trove – and it's all tainted by the evils they explore throughout their lives. Like mortals, the baatezu learn to look back through the filters of experience, and they constantly reinterpret past events to glean nuggets of knowledge for use in the future.

Fortunately, like an aging human, the baatezu don't always have immediate access to their pasts. The longer a fiend lives, the farther its memory stretches, and the harder it becomes to recall insignificant facts. Naturally, as the

baatezu move up in rank, they gain greater intelligence, and thus greater ability to process old memories. But just as it can take a long time to locate one particular phrase in a book, it can take even longer to pull minute details out of a memory that spans millennia. So, unless a baatezu just happens to store certain important details right at the front of its mind, it'll need a few moments to (for example) recall the name of a mortal it met once before.

That's how you can fool them. Remain insignificant enough for as long as you can to avoid their suspicions (as much as anyone can avoid their suspicions) – just long enough to do your deed and get away with it. 'Course, from that moment forth, you'd better keep a constant vigil for the fiend's vengeance. Being made a fool of by a mortal is an insult a baatezu doesn't forget easily – certainly not in the span of a mortal's life.

In short, the baatezu don't forget their previous stations and previous feuds. They may undergo startling changes in shape and ability, but the transformations refine their minds and their memories (though spellcasting fiends do lose their learned spells).

♦ STATION + STATION ♦ Nomoto Sinh

I was able to uncover information on 13 different kinds of baatezu; I don't think any others exist. The fiends fall into three overall castes (least, lesser, and greater), and within each caste, into numerous stations (specific types). Apparently, the time spent in each station is meant to teach a particular lesson about the nature of lawful evil and its place in the multiverse.

It seems the lowest stations – that of lemure and nupperibo – don't impart any specific lessons. That might be because those two miserable ranks barely qualify as baatezu in the first place. (Remember, as our friend Tam reported, nupperibos actually belong to another race entirely.) Perhaps the fiends make their lowest kind nearly mindless so they can fully manipulate the creatures and set them rigidly on the course of evil. The higher baatezu decide the behavior that marks the lower fiends for the rest of their lives.

LEAST BAATEZU

The lemures fester at the very bottom of the scale of baatezu politics. Again, many scholars seem reluctant to classify them as true baatezu, leaving them officially unranked and definitely unnamed. The lemures are the mindless armies of the Blood War, the rank-and-file, incapable of making decisions on their own. They're driven into battle by threats of pain and destruction. However, as pathetic as they are, lemures are also the steppingstone to greater things (they can be promoted to spinagon station; and from there higher still).

But don't forget the nupperibos, the strange creatures forcibly reshaped into baatezu. The lawful fiends put forth the lie that nupperibos are true members of their race, and

that the bloated monsters are turned into lemures as punishment. Unfortunately, most lower-planar sages believed that story, having no good reason to suspect otherwise, until very recently, when chant purchased from yugoloths revealed the truth. (Of course, one might wonder how much faith to place in such revelations, but I assure you, the 'loths proved their claim exceedingly well, although I'm sworn not to discuss their evidence here.)

Interestingly, it seems that some nupperibos are actually higher-ranking baatezu that died outside of Baator and were reborn into that low shape, left to toil unknown and unwanted until such time (if ever) as they're discovered and restored to their previous rank. This, to me, is simply more proof that nupperibos aren't really baatezu at all, but the original, naturally occurring spawn of Baator. It must vex the fiends greatly to know that when they die, they re-enter the world in a "foreign" shape; no wonder they're so eager to turn nupperibos into lemures!

Still, for the sake of convenience, we'll continue to refer to nupperibos as "least baatezu" throughout this book. Perhaps in time, as the truth becomes more widely known, we can do away with that fiction entirely.

The last of the least baatezu are the spinagons, the expendable messengers and information-gatherers of Baator. Though they're the weakest and the most bullied of the intelligent baatezu, they're also the first rank that can determine their own eventual fate. A spinagon who serves well can rise as high as amnizu. (That's an incredibly rare occurrence; far more common is a promotion to one of the three kinds of abishai.)

The station of spinagon is also the first one in which the baatezu learn a lesson: *It's best to succeed early and avoid the trouble of dealing with the in-betweens.*

LESSER BAATEZU

The reptilian abishai's three ranks are (in order of ascending influence) black, green, and red. Ironically, black abishai are often more despised throughout Baator than are spinagons. After all, a spinagon who performs well can be promoted to a number of higher ranks — barbazu, osyluth, and even amnizu. But a spinagon who lacks ambition and cunning receives the smallest possible promotion and becomes a black abishai.

Thus, black abishai are seen as fiends without purpose (except as fodder for the armies). And if that perception doesn't drive a black abishai to try to change its station, it truly is one of the most worthless creatures on the plane. "Spinagons have potential," said an erinyes I bribed on the Outlands (though with what, I will not say). "But a black abishai? Nothing but a spinagon without enough drive to make something useful of itself!"

She exaggerates; black abishai *do* have their uses. As the most commonly summoned lesser baatezu (the barbazu and osyluths are also called, but less frequently), they're given access to strong magic so they can corrupt inexperienced mortals with the promise of great power. And black abishai who perform admirably can still rectify their previ-

ous mistake, gaining promotions to green and, later, red abishai. From there, they can rise to the stations of barbazu, kocrachon (for those with slightly more promise), or erinyes (for the very talented).

The lesson of the abishai: *Through determination and clever thinking, even early mistakes can be overcome.*

Next: the barbazu and kocrachons. Though technically equal in station, these two fiends are worlds apart in their perceptions and goals. Barbazu, strong and dull-witted killing machines, are on the slow track of promotion. (Red abishai who excel skip this station altogether.) Barbazu are the elite of the baatezu warriors, yes, but they also suffer incredible losses in the battles of the Blood War. They are, in short, expendable berserkers, condemned to fight by their lack of ambition. They can rise only to the rank of osyluth.

The twin lessons of the barbazu: *Savage determination drives one quite efficiently, and it takes more skill than luck to survive.*

Kocrachons, the elite torturers of Baator, are creatures of horror and nightmare. Where the barbazu are noted for their ferocity on the field of battle, the kocrachons are known for their skill and subtlety with the instruments of cruelty — the very antithesis of the dull and brutal warriors. They extract battle plans and information about spies from tanar'ri and celestial prisoners of war, and from mortals unwise enough to fall into fiendish hands. Masters of their trades, kocrachons are respected by every other kind of baatezu for their ability to wring a confession from even the most unwilling throat. (Interestingly, the most skilled kocrachons earn the respect of their victims as well, who learn to equate exquisite pain with love; the mortals and celestials among them are especially dangerous when — or if — released.) But no matter how successful their methods, kocrachons can be promoted only to the station of erinyes.

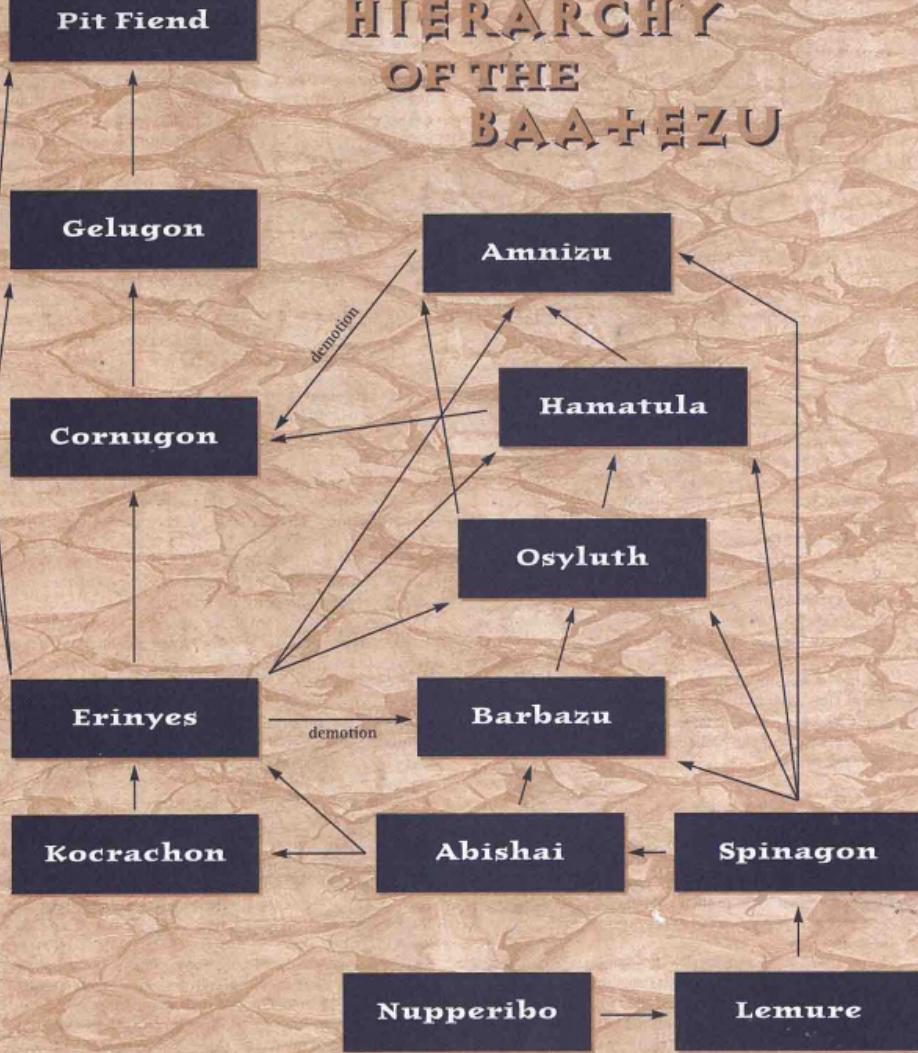
The lesson of the kocrachon: *Take pains to induce in others respect for a being of obvious skill.*

The rank of erinyes is thought to be a reward for baatezu who've overcome their initial sluggishness, for those who've had to suffer through the stations to prove their worth. Though erinyes are strictly female, they can assume either male or female form in order to best seduce hapless mortals. Erinyes are spies as well, sent to learn secrets from enemies and allies alike. And these fiends are frighteningly good at both tasks. They can rise directly to any rank above them (even straight to that of pit fiend!), or they can suffer demotion to the station of barbazu, depending on how well they serve their masters (they're said to report directly to the Dark Eight). However, the most common move is to the station of osyluth.

The lesson of the erinyes: *Cunning and creative thinking earn great rewards.*

Like the spinagons and the black abishai, the osyluths are hated among the baatezu, but for a very different reason: The osyluths have power over all others of their race (excepting only the pit fiends). In essence, osyluths are the guardians of baatezu morality and caste. They watch to make sure the ideals of law and evil are upheld by every

THE HIERARCHY OF THE BAA-FEZU



member of the race. How can they tell whether a baatezu serves well? My sources could not (or would not) say, remarking only that a baatezu who fails the questions put to it by an osyluth quickly finds itself immersed in the boiling waters and scalding agonies of the Pit of Flame. And no one looks forward to tortures like that.

Fear of such punishment sometimes drives other baatezu to kill osyluths, but only when they can do so with secrecy — the bony fiends are often thought to be agents of the pit fiends. Still, the station will never be wiped out. My erinyes contact laughed when I asked her to confirm the rumor that only a thousand osyluths exist at any one time. She told me that once per century, a thousand osyluths are promoted to a higher station and a thousand replacements promoted from below, but that figure by no means represents *all* of them. Perhaps the inaccurate count was simply a story spread by other baatezu to make the hated osyluths seem weak and scarce.

In any case, the lesson of the osyluth: *Learn to love and uphold the law.*

The hamatula are the last of the lesser baatezu. As guardians and patrollers, hamatula usually wander the third and fourth layers of Baator (Minauros and Phlegethos) with unceasing vigilance. A popular misconception is that hamatula cannot leave Baator or travel the layers of their plane; they can, but their superiors usually command them *not* to.

Hamatula make sure nothing slips past the cordon of the first two layers of Baator (Avernum and Dis). They also serve as the personal guard of pit fiends who aren't quite as high-ranking as the Dark Eight. The creatures make excellent guardians and are among the few baatezu who can travel alone with impunity. Others are often stopped and questioned, but the hamatula are known to be solitary wanderers. Thus, they make fine messengers and spies for higher fiends who don't want to draw attention to themselves.

The lesson of the hamatula: *Loyalty and service earn many privileges.*

GREA+ER BAA+EZU

The cornugons are members of the elite defense forces of Baator, the personal bodyguards of the most powerful pit fiends, and the first of the greater baatezu. Of all the fiends, they're the most loyal to their commanders. Their nature is rigid and militaristic, and this puts them in good stead with those they serve.

Cornugons who perform well might earn command of armies of lesser fiends. Those who demonstrate exceptional ability are allowed to serve with the 106 cornugons who guard the Dark Eight, though not for long. Most such cornugons are promoted rapidly (relatively speaking) to gelu-

gons; few remain in the station for more than a millennium or two.

The lesson of the cornugon, which follows the Unity of Rings: *Command is another form of service, and service leads to greater command.*

The next station is that of amnizu, a prestigious yet somehow undesirable position. Though amnizu rank higher than cornugons, they must first suffer a *demotion* to cornugon status before they can rise further in the chain of command. (Draw your own comparisons to the similar nupperibo-lemure relationship, but don't let any amnizu overheat your theory.)

Amnizu are called the Keepers of the Styx; they're immune to its draining effect. They guard Stygia, the fifth layer of Baator, against invasion (tanar'ric and otherwise). Though the

fiends fulfill their duties admirably, amnizu are notoriously treacherous. Perhaps they want to break out of the role of guardian, or they wish to show the rest of the baatezu that their rank is equal to that of pit fiend — in respect if nothing else. Regardless, amnizu scheme to raise their status, and some say they'd even betray agents of the Dark Eight if given the chance.

The lesson of the amnizu: *No matter how high you rise, there's always someone or something higher.*

Next come the gelugons, fiends who enjoy the second-highest station among the baatezu. They alone are entrusted to guard the only known portal to Malsheem (the Dark Eight's fortress in Nessus, the ninth layer of Baator), and they're quite loyal to their superiors. Why? For the most part, it's because they have to serve with a perfect record for 777 years to be promoted to the station of pit fiend. If they make even a single mistake, they begin again. Many gelugons go through their service up to nine times or more — it's almost impossible not to make some sort of mistake.

The fiends take this abuse, knowing that they're just one step away from the true power of Baator. Interestingly, it seems that the fear of mistakes keeps many gelugons from weaving schemes that are too complex. Of course, they still make deals, but they generally tend to postpone the grand conclusions of their plans until after they've been promoted.

The lesson of the gelugon: *A thing coveted is worth the wait.*

Finally, we come to the pit fiends. These creatures are the overlords of the race, the most terrifying of all baatezu. Their might is incalculable. Their desires are beyond comprehension. And their appetites defy all understanding. Raised from the shrieking agonies of the Pit of Flame, they understand pain and suffering like no others. Purged of the impurities of their previous stations, they emerge with a crystal-clear understanding of their nature and their future hopes. Wherever they travel, they travel with the might of all Baator behind them. They are the movers of the baatezu,

and they bow only to the Dark Eight (who are pit fiends themselves), the nobles (who are something more), and the Lords of the Nine (who may be deities).

The lesson of the pit fiend is this: *Power clarifies, and absolute power clarifies absolutely.*

THE PROCESS ◆ OF PROMOTION ◆

Nomoto Sinh

How are baatezu promoted? Well, lemures are chosen by chance and left to work up to their own potential. And that's the last time chance plays a role in their lives. From that point on, they're watched, catalogued, numbered, and ordered, so the higher fiends can determine which of them are worthy of promotion, which are the best decision-makers and the promising leaders of the next generation of baatezu, and which are doomed to be tanar'ri-fodder for the rest of their miserable existences.

Yes, there are entire baatezu ministries devoted to simple record-keeping and observation. And the ministries are fairly important, too. Supposedly, not a single person in all the history of the multiverse has ever broken into one. (Of course, if anyone *has*, he was no doubt exterminated before he could even breathe a word of his accomplishment.)

The point of all this observation is to ensure that only the most competent make it to the top. A baatezu's got to show ambition, strength, and (most of all) the intelligence to make a splash in the fiendish world. After all, the race is centered around the tenets of law and evil, which are, in turn, geared toward the idea of the strong rising to the top, dominating the weak and disorderly.

My erinyes informant remarked that it would be more than a shame if an unworthy baatezu were to rise — it would be a *catastrophe*. "Just look at the tanar'ri," she said. "Uncountable fiends at their command, and still the fools can't defeat us! We rise based on skill and cunning, but they rise through luck and hatred. That won't win many fights in the long run."

Perhaps that's why the baatezu protect their secrets and observations so well — their very existence depends on wise promotions through the ranks. The lesser baatezu feel the urge to rise in caste so they don't get stepped on by their betters, and higher fiends actually seem to feel a duty to their race. But whether it's truly a matter of obligation, survival, or just selfish power-grabbing is moot — the baatezu work to promote their race, and that's what matters.

METHODS

The methods for promotion from caste to caste and station to station vary. For example, some baatezu are thrown into the Pit of Flame, their impurities burned away by its cleansing fire. Those who suffer there the longest emerge as pit fiends — their torment lasts 1,001 days, a span of time that only a gelugon or a particularly strong-willed erinyes could muster the fortitude to face.

Other baatezu go through similar tortures to ascend to the next station. I believe that the excruciation endured is in direct proportion to the speed of the promotion, and that achieving each new rank involves suffering a different kind of pain. All of these tortures are immediate (unlike those of the tanar'ri, which are said to occur over a long period of time), and all of them require the assistance of other baatezu to complete the rituals and imbue the promoted fiend with its new abilities. For example:

- ◆ A lemure chosen to become a spinagon fights in a vast gladiatorial combat with others of its kind, striking down all comers until it's the only one left standing. The winner is then carted off and its skin peeled from its body, revealing the spinagon that has formed inside the waxlike shell of the former lemure.
- ◆ An abishai selected to become an erinyes must submit to the tender ministrations of the kocra-chons in the Knoll of Blades, who rearrange the features of the fiend to make it more pleasing to mortals. They also carve another syllable into the fiend's spirit, making it a more complicated creature, more difficult to summon, and more cunning than ever before. (See illustration on next page.)
- ◆ An osyluth promoted to the station of amnizu undergoes the ritual racking, drawing, and quartering necessary for ascension. As each limb is yanked from the osyluth's body, a smaller one emerges from the torso. When the assisting osyluths peel off the bony face of the scorpion-fiend, they leave behind a sticky caul on the new amnizu's face. The amnizu must remove the caul by force of will alone, or it will die before its promotion is complete.

RISING + POWER

What does a baatezu's promotion entail? In other words, how long — and how well — must it serve before it becomes eligible to move up to the next station? Well, the answer (observing the multiversal Rule of Threes, of which the baatezu seem so fond) really depends on three factors: the fiend's current station, its ability to shed undesirable elements in its spirit, and the reports of its superior(s).

As mentioned previously, promotion for the lowest members of the race is little more than a matter of chance. Lemures who don't become spinagons after a certain amount of time are simply absorbed into the fabric of the plane, as are ordinary petitioners on other planes.

Other baatezu can expect changes in station if they're diligent and learn their lessons well. Promotions can take thousands of years for underachieving or obstinate fiends, but even the most gifted baatezu must serve in a station for at least a century before moving on. Sometimes, a baatezu must remain in a rank for a set period, with time added for poor performance. For example, the absolute minimum time a gelugon can serve is 777 years, and it often serves much, much longer.

The Ministry of Promotion (overseen by the pit fiend Zaebos, a member of the Dark Eight) won't let a fiend ascend until it meets the stringent requirements of its future station. The stories of quotas for how many baatezu rise and fall per year, per century, and so forth, are nonsense. If, in a given time period, there aren't enough capable fiends to promote to the rank of amnizu, then there just won't be as many amnizu for awhile — plain and simple. Though the inspectors of the Ministry discourage short promotions and may punish superiors who fail to deliver good educations, they won't fill ranks with the unready. No incompetent baatezu can ever rise to power.

Interestingly, that doesn't mean that a fiend who *does* succeed is the cream of the crop. My erinyes contact told me that when a pit fiend asks for "exemplary service," he doesn't expect a stellar performance so much as the absence of mistakes. In other words, the baatezu care less for rewarding the good than they do for punishing the bad — it provides the fiends with examples of what to avoid. Sadly, sometimes the ideal of "the bad" can change, depending on how much a superior wants to stop a particular baatezu from rising through the ranks.

That might even mean doctoring reports and evaluations to keep a fiend down. Of course, this practice is officially discouraged, and a fiend seen to be wrongly hampering the education of a promising young baatezu is taken to task in methods so harsh they defy description. In any case, the reports are audited in ways that baffle the fiends of lesser ranks. I've heard that the audits are simply

based on the likely progress of a fiend from station to station, as well as the careful study of its superior's tactics. Thus it is that the fiends have to garnish both their superiors and the inspectors from the Ministry of Promotion.

And, of course, being caught in a bribe warrants punishment. See how the baatezu way encourages subtlety and covering one's tracks?

DEMOTIONS

"None may rise unless another falls." Most of the time that axiom refers to face and prestige among one's fellows, but for the baatezu, it's often literally true.

If a member of the race just isn't working out in its position, or if it commits a serious wrong against baatezu law, the high-ups have no choice but to demote it. The severity of the demotion depends on the severity of the transgression, as well as the number of offenses the fiend might have accumulated previously. Minor faults can result in the demotion of a station within a caste or, on a bad day, a full reduction in caste. More serious errors can knock a baatezu down several castes. And the most heinous crimes can result in a demotion to the rank of lemure (and perhaps a reassignment to the front lines of the Blood War).



Some mistakes, certainly, can be covered up, depending on how high a baatezu stands and how powerful its friends are. But when a fiend falls, it's usually marked in some way to make its punishment clear. Even worse, if the demoted one is forced to remain in the ranks it formerly commanded, it's likely to end up in the dead-book (baatezu are notoriously unforgiving of anyone who's done them wrong). Some demoted fiends take the route of the rogue, rather than face the punishment likely to be doled out by their new peers.

THE PIT OF FLAME

Of the schools of punishment on Baator, none seem quite so excruciating and fearsome to the baatezu as the Pit of Flame, which sits in the center of Phlegethos (the fourth layer). I haven't seen it myself (nor would I want to), but the Pit is said to be a huge lake of boiling filth and excreta, burning with searing white flames that reach over a hundred feet high. Supposedly, all osylths have the power to magically deposit in the Pit any baatezu (except a pit fiend) that flouts Baatorian law.

Legends say that the screams of prisoners ring the miles around the Pit of Flame, and that it's constantly guarded by nine companies of corrugons, who watch to make sure none leave before their time — nor others enter. Why would anyone want to enter the Pit, you ask? Because to the fiends of Baator, it's a place of purification as well as punishment. A baatezu who bathes in the tormenting flames can gain strength and heal wounds both mental and spiritual. On the other hand, any creature that doesn't tend toward law and evil is instantly consumed by the fires (and, some say, reborn as a slave to the fiends — but that may just be a tale to frighten children).

Naturally, the fire isn't *real* fire as we know it at all, since most baatezu are immune to even magical flames. Instead, it's some kind of fiery energy drawn up from the essence of Baator itself. Of course, it might as well be ordinary fire to mortals, as it burns them just as easily.

BODILY FORM AND FUNCTIONS ♦ Tealo Wilton

The body of a baatezu matures toward a "perfect form" as it ascends through the fiendish hierarchy. The logic and symmetry of its shape increase with each progressive incarnation, though the changes aren't always apparent to an untrained eye — or, for that matter, to an eye that's unfamiliar with baatezu logic and style. And the higher up the ladder a fiend climbs, the more twisted the logit that goes into its creation.



ON THE RARE OCCASIONS
WHEN I MAKE A MISTAKE,
I ADMIT + + + —
OR, RATHER,
I MAKE SOMEONE ELSE
ADMIT + + + .

— ANAI YORGUN, AMNIZU.
ON AVOIDING DEMOTIONS

Sometimes, even I have to admit that the forms of the baatezu seem like mundane and, well, gargoyleish, baroque shells chosen for their ability to frighten mortals — though naturally, they can adopt more pleasing features to lure those same victims. But then I look deeper, and I always find the baatezu creatures of strange beauty. Though deemed hideous by conventional standards, these fiends marry form and function almost perfectly within their bodies.

The basic shapes of the race are generally fairly well adapted to the layers of Baator; even Cania has evolved its own baatezu. They can withstand extremes of both heat and cold, and their very nature helps to deflect most of the magic a mortal might hurl against them. They are, in short, some of the toughest creatures in the multiverse.

Though their forms vary, a body with an eye for detail can spot similarities if she knows where to look for them. Discounting the lemures and the nupperibos, we see that, hierarchically, the forms tend to alternate between an appearance of delicacy or fragility and one of density or danger. Examining the hierarchy in order of rank (rather than in

order of promotion, which yields different results), the fiends' bodies vary almost perfectly between the two extremes, the only exceptions being the erinyes/osyluth and hamatula/corngon.

Is this confusing yet? Do try to keep up.

If we look at similarities along the various promotion paths, we get entirely different interpretations. That's part of the beauty of the baatezu caste system. It's like reading a novel with various paths to follow through the chapters, where each reading gives a different vision of the work as a whole.

PARTS

Firstly, to get this out of the way: Baatezu keep their vitals in much the same place as do most human and demihuman mortals. Of course, their vitals are quite different than those of mortals, since baatezu have quite different goals and instincts. Likewise, they don't breathe as often or as deeply as do mortals, so filling their lungs with poisonous gas doesn't bother them quite as much.

They do have eyes, ears, tongues, skin, vocal cords, and other apparatus that are fairly similar to what a mortal uses for perception. They also possess hearts, lungs, kidneys, brains, and all that — it's just that a baatezu's use for these organs differs from a mortal's. To put it bluntly, a body who cuts open both a baatezu and an ordinary prime-material human might not notice much difference in the

gross appearance of major organs. But the truth is in the details:

- ◆ A baatezu's pineal gland (or third eye) is more highly developed. The fiends are attuned to portals and the hidden secrets of the planes, and their pineal gland has grown to reflect that sensitivity.
- ◆ A baatezu's adrenal gland can be up to *three times* the size of a human's (especially among the barbazu)! This accounts not only for their incredible speed and ferocity in battle, but also for their notoriously aggressive behavior.
- ◆ Certain baatezu muscles are altered to fit the power that courses through their veins. The muscles are generally longer, meaning that the fiends have fantastic endurance. And while not as highly developed, the shorter muscles are more open to the flow of blood and other fluids, allowing the fiends to perform great feats of strength for short periods of time.
- ◆ Baatezu blood tends to flow as black as the waters of the Styx, though it changes depending on the atmosphere it's exposed to.
- ◆ The internal organs of the baatezu are, like their skin, usually covered with supple, leathery scales. This helps to account for their natural ability to resist blows and to heal more quickly than most when struck.
- ◆ Baatezu bones seem to be made of a different material than most bones. They're slightly metallic, and many seem to have been *carved* before placement in the body — almost as if their owners had been *constructed*. This is a mystery I've yet to crack.

GENDER

Many berks who don't understand the baatezu as well as I do never seem to know whether to use "he," "she," or "it" when referring to such a fiend. The terms are not equal; all baatezu clearly fall into one of the three categories. But like so much else in Baatorian society, the gender of a fiend is determined by its high-ups, based on the fiend's performance in its past station[s].

Naturally, there is a pattern to the assignment of gender, and it follows the Rule of Threes. Among all baatezu [save the erinyes, which are female only, and the lemures and nupperibus, which are utterly genderless], one third of the fiends are male, one third female, and one third sexless. This breaks down still further within each station; thus, one third of the spinagons are male, one third are female, and one third are left to wonder at the mysteries of the other two.

What role does gender play in baatezu society? For creatures with the power to alter their appearance at will, it would seem to be a superfluous difference, and it's a safe bet that the baatezu don't give a toss one way or another — unless it matters to their duties (as with the erinyes, whose job is to lure mortals of all stripes and temperament).

I have an explanation, of course: The baatezu simply desire to understand as broad a reach of behavior as pos-

sible, and can learn this only by assuming the forms of all genders possible through each of the stages of their life. Thus, when a baatezu is promoted to a higher station, it might keep the same gender or be given another. It all depends on what the fiend still needs to learn (or what its superiors *think* it needs to learn). It's the only explanation that really makes any sense, despite the criticism levelled at me by undoubtedly jealous peers.

My theory has one exception: When a baatezu is promoted to the station of pit fiend, it becomes free to choose its sex. A pit fiend can even change its mind later in life and switch genders, but only by first spending three days in the Pit of Flame. Baatezu who ascend beyond the rank of pit fiend and become nobles are again chained to a single gender (though, as usual, they can change their *appearance* to that of another).

BIRTH

Do you ever wonder why nobody sees baby baatezu? It's an easy answer, really — there aren't any. Male baatezu are fertile, but females are not. Thus, baatezu are not born in the conventional sense and do not grow from infancy to adulthood. When they achieve a promotion to a certain station, they begin their new life as a fully formed fiend of their new rank.

Indeed, Baatorian society is far more egalitarian than that of most prime-material worlds. By that I mean that a fiend needn't worry about its station or circumstances, because anyone with enough cunning and tenacity can make it to the top. There's no "glass ceiling." It's all a matter of how driven the fiend is and whether that drive is fueled by greed, ambition, or a sincere desire to change. Some say that this is the only redeeming feature of the baatezu society; I say it's merely indicative of the race's ascendance in the multiverse.

Pardon me — I've strayed from the subject at hand. Although female baatezu cannot give birth, male baatezu are fully capable of fathering offspring, and their society encourages them to do so — with other races. It is part of the baatezu's agenda to enrich the multiverse with their dark seed, as certain mortals have learned, no doubt to their dismay [see "Dealing With Mortals," later in this chapter]. Some of these fiends are certainly driven by lust, but for the most part, their zeal flows from an adherence to the greater agenda of leaving the baatezu mark on the multiverse.

NOURISHMENT

One of the base requirements of all creatures is sustenance — almost everyone needs to take in some form of nourishment. Even the powers depend on the belief of their worshipers to sustain their existence. It's no different with the baatezu.

But what exactly do they ingest? Folks from all walks of life have seen baatezu eat just about anything a mortal can eat, though of course they prefer meat. (The nupperibus eat nothing, but then, they're not really baatezu, are they?) The fiends also make distinctions as to the source of their food. That is, they prefer meat from an intelligent creature,

they treasure meat from a good-aligned sentient creature, and they prize most highly of all meat from a paragon of goodness, like a deva or solar. They also eat their own kind, if necessary, though they'd rather dine on larvae, tanar'ri, or yugoloths. So what's the common thread?

Unlike the tanar'ri, who are thought to take their sustenance from terror and pain, the baatezu derive nourishment from life itself, from the symbolic devouring of the individual spark. When a baatezu eats a creature that possesses life and will, it subsumes that life into its own, thus making the energy serve its own needs.

I'm certain that's why the baatezu take such pleasure in consuming beings of good or chaos; in so doing, they use the lives of their enemies for the baatezu cause, lives that otherwise would be devoted to working *against* them. By eating the flesh of their foes, they not only weaken their opponents but also strengthen themselves. It's a zero-sum game — what one gains, another must lose.

No doubt my revelations will amaze many readers, especially those from the Prime Material Plane. Why, if I had a copper piece for every prime who thinks the baatezu feed on the spirits of the living... It's simply not so. These people have most likely seen erinyes at work, dragging mortals away to Baator or fabricated their stories out of whole cloth. Baatezu don't eat spirits unless said spirits are first distilled into physical form (as larvae or lesser fiends). Certainly, the fiends can *take* these essences from the living, but spirits are made for corruption, and eating them would be a waste of valuable resources.

As for drinking: Baator's said to hold great rivers and bottomless lakes of fluids precious to the baatezu. Most of these fluids were once precious to the *living*, and I trust I need say no more than that. While away from their home plane, the baatezu can drink the fluids of other creatures or even draw moisture from the very air to refresh themselves (though again, nupperibus drink nothing).

Here's the dark of it, though: The baatezu don't *need* to eat or drink anything. It's just one of their pleasures. All they truly need to exist is the awe and dread of creatures below them. Certainly, they enjoy consuming meat, and they relish sacrifices and offerings, but the baatezu are partly creatures of belief, and in the end, belief is what they feed on.

SLEEP AND DREAMS

When it comes right down to it, the baatezu are still living creatures, and all living creatures need to rest, even if it's just for a few moments. The lower ranks sleep more frequently than the higher, though their rests are of much shorter duration. For example, the lemures snatch moments of sleep — no more than five minutes at a time — in between long periods of being crowded, jostled, and forced into combat. The spinagons, likewise, must always be available for their superiors and can only catnap. A typical rest for spinagons lasts

only one hour, and therefore the fiends must sleep several times a day. Generally, lower-station baatezu who serve well are allowed more time to themselves for rest.

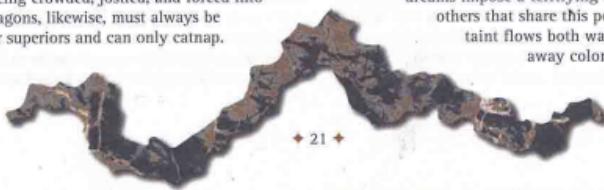
And so it goes up the ladder. The higher ranks are busy and have fewer opportunities for sleep, but when they *do* rest, it's for longer periods of time. Of course, Baatorian ambition compels most high-ups to devote all their waking time to service, and they usually begrudge themselves any breaks. They want to prove their worth, and those who yearn to make something of themselves sleep as little as possible. As creatures of tremendous will, baatezu can hold off for months at a time. But when exhaustion catches up to them... suffice it to say they're out of commission for a week or two. It's worst for the greatest of the fiends. They can keep themselves awake for years, decades, even centuries at a time. But they eventually pay the price, falling completely out of consciousness until they've replenished their stores of energy.

That's why they guard their sleeping places so jealously. Why, any basher who happened upon a sleeping baatezu could wreak considerable damage on the fiend before it could rouse itself from its stupor. Thus, too, is a baatezu's sleeping place ringed with wards and hidden from the most careful searchers. Naturally, the mightier the fiend, the mightier its protections. Woe to the fool who tries to violate the sanctity of a pit fiend's sleep!

For the exact ratio of waking to sleeping, we turn again to the Rule of Threes — or an extension thereof. As near as I can tell, baatezu normally sleep for one hour for every nine in which they're awake, with slight differences allowed for personal discipline. (It's a known fact that some baatezu follow the tenets of law more closely than others.) I must admit that my theory is based on observations of lower-ranking fiends; I've not had the chance to measure the sleeping schedules of higher creatures, but only because I haven't been alive long enough to do so.

On to the next topic: Do baatezu dream? It's a good question. I've gathered enough evidence to posit that baatezu definitely dream, and that their dreams are more vivid than those of any mortal. Naturally, they have their own ideas of what makes for good and bad dreams. What a baatezu might consider a nightmare would be a nectar-filled dream for a tanar'ri, a blessing for an archon, or the queasy, half-remembered ravings of a prime-material barmy. The baatezu's most pleasant dreams are better known as the horrified nightmares of bashers across the planes.

These dreams have a purpose, too; they serve to energize the fiends through their next period of wakefulness. I also believe that the baatezu draw their dreams from — and contribute dreams to — a sort of collective planar dreaming. (The Outer Planes are built on belief, and what are dreams but the beliefs of the unconscious?) Baatorian dreams impose a terrifying order on the minds of others that share this pool of visions, but the taint flows both ways: The baatezu come away colored by the perceptions of others.



◆ POWERS ◆

Regnus Roy

The baatezu're a tough bunch of bashers. Every single kind's got one or more special abilities; even the sodding lemures regenerate when they're hacked to bits.

Most baatezu have separate spell-like powers, too. And all of the lessers and greater share the same group of spell-like powers on top of everything else.

See, they can create illusions from the thin fabric of space and mind. They can call daeders back to service (though the corpse won't have the spark of life). They can bend a body to their will. They can see in the dark. They can tell a cutter's views just by looking at him. Worst of all, they can drop themselves from one place to another — even from plane to plane — just by thinking about it.

'Course, the fiends aren't calling on that last power much lately. Instead of teleporting all over the multiverse, they've been taking the Great Paths and ordinary portals. That should make a canny blood wonder if maybe, just maybe, the baatezu're having trouble doing some of their fancy tricks. On the other hand, think on that *too* much and a body's likely to second-guess himself and wonder if the fiends're just running a peel, and *that* sort of thinking leads to seeing a baatezu around every corner and under every bed.

It's best just to figure they're as tough as they've always been. Better safe than sorry.

ALTERATIONS

It's no dark that the baatezu've played around with ways to make themselves more powerful. They've created "study groups" to see how a bit of tinkering with the promotion process can alter standard baatezu abilities. With my own eyes, I've seen the results. Some of 'em are funnier than a modron in Limbo, but some of 'em — well, they're downright frightening. I don't mind saying.

Even more frightening than the changes themselves is the knowledge that the baatezu're ready to implement the ones that prove useful. That means the berks could fiddle with every single promotion ritual to make themselves stronger and deadlier than ever. Chant I've picked up in Sigil is that many baatezu high-ups are traditionalists and don't want to mess around with tried and true methods, but a growing number are more adventurous — they feel that controlling change is the best way to make sure that *uncontrolled* change doesn't sweep the race. Whatever happens, the outcome'll determine the fate of the baatezu, and thus the rest of the Lower Planes.

The Dark

All baatezu (and tanar'ri) have lost the ability to *teleport without error*, as detailed in the boxed set *Hellbound: The Blood War*. The fiends can regain the ability only by swearing loyalty to the yugoloths, who secretly stripped them of the power in the first place. Few baatezu have even admitted the loss to each other, let alone to their enemies; they don't want to be perceived as vulnerable. In the halls of the highest, pit fiends discuss the problem. Meanwhile, they simply hand down edicts that forbid the lower ranks from trying to use the power at all.

most tanar'ri. A bit useless for Blood War combat, if you ask me. The baatezu must've thought so too, because in some cornugons they've changed the electricity into acid. Their new *acid bolt* power causes the same damage as the old *lightning bolt*, but with a good deal more pain and howling.

The cornugons with *acid bolt* have a more brownish tint than the others, and their hands are free of scales.

COLD-IRON-EQUIPPED BARBAZU

The standard saw-toothed glaives of the barbazu are slowly being replaced with similar glaives made of cold-wrought iron. This isn't the case across the board — ever try to get a barbazu to give up its glaive, even in exchange for a new one? But some of the baatezu high-ups're pushing for a total changeover. After all, the barbazu are primarily Blood Warriors, and cold iron brings a lot more hurt to a tanar'ri than ordinary steel.

Since this change doesn't alter the physical makeup of the barbazu, the ones with cold-iron glaives don't look any different than the others. 'Course, the weapon itself is grayer and a lot less shiny.

MAGICAL SPINAGONS

Everyone knows that a spinagon's spines burst into flame when released from its body. Till now, this fire's just been an ordinary reaction between the fiend's blood and the air. But the baatezu've altered some of the Rituals of Spined Descent to make it a *magical* flame. Though it seems to cause a slight drain on the spinagons' reserves (they lose a small bit of their life force with each spine fired), I've heard more than one say that it's worth the cost. Whether they say this because they've been told to or because they actually believe it is a matter of opinion.

The spinagons with the magical-flame enhancement are of a slightly darker red color than their companions.

WARMER GELUGONS

All baatezu take full damage from electricity and lightning, and choice gelugons've been adapted to try to get around

Here's what I've been able to dig up. Each of these separate experiments is headed by a different baatezu high-up, though I'd bet that none of the leaders're lower than pit fiend rank. But there's one thing that helps the rest of us out: When a baatezu's been altered, it shows — the fiend's outward appearance changes. Unfortunately, the differences are slight; they're practically invisible to any berk who hasn't spent time studying the baatezu form.

ACIDIC CORNUGONS

A normal cornugon's main offensive weapon is its *lightning bolt* ability, which has no effect on

that weakness. Such fiends have a greater resistance to electricity and lightning, magical and otherwise, so they only suffer half as much from a jolt. Unfortunately for them, the process also makes their skin less icy, so their power to radiate cold from their tails has likewise diminished by half.

A blood can spot an electricity-resistant gelugon by its odd skin (which is more transparent than normal) and the extra antennae atop its head.

COLDER GELUGONS.

The flip side of the electricity experiments has created gelugons that're even *more* frigid than usual. See, the yugoloths have a strange vulnerability to cold of all sorts, so the baatezu high-ups like to send detachments of enhanced gelugons along with any crucial yugoloth mercenary companies. By doubling the strength of the gelugons' cold, the pit fiends hope to ensure that the yugoloths won't turn stag — not unless they feel like losing their entire force to their extra-chilly baatezu comrades.

The gelugons so treated are bright blue, not fading even in the glooms of the Gray Waste.

ASSASSINS.

The baatezu've lost enough of their kind to cambion assassins to know the value of elite fiends skilled in stealth and murder. And now they're creating some of their own. The baatezu given this duty are chosen from all walks of life, from lesser to greater — some of the brightest are even culled from the ranks before their promotions. It's said they're promised an extra station in their next promotion if they prove to be good assassins; few baatezu'd turn that down. They have to give up one of the abilities of their current station — one of their powers, at random, is just boiled clean out of their body — but in exchange they gain the knack to turn *invisible* and the skill to move silently over 90% of the time.

The baatezu chosen for this elite service tend to look thinner and less substantial than their companions, and they move as if with the passage of a breeze.

ILLUSIONISTS.

Not all of the experiments are smashing successes. I've heard chant of one that enables a fiend to juice up its *advanced illusion* power, making the creations strong enough and real enough to fool even a marilith. What's more, these baatezu can direct their illusions to attack and cause actual physical damage.

Here's the catch: Every time the fiends call on their enhanced skill, they've got to give up part of their own life force permanently to make it work. Rumor has it that when they finally deplete their store, they wink out of existence entirely. No promotion for these leatherheads, eh? Whatever fiend's in charge of this group'd best cover its tracks.

The baatezu in this category are emaciated and sickly — even more so than the osyluths. I've never seen an osyluth with the enhanced-illusion power, or maybe I have and I just couldn't tell the difference.)

BLIND FIENDS.

All fiends have a vulnerability to *magic missiles*; the baatezu have decided to capitalize on it. Sadly (for them), the method they've settled on ain't working out too well. See, they tried to shape fiends that could fire the missiles from their eyes. That part worked just fine. In combat, they can fire two *magic missiles* each minute — one per eye — with an unlimited supply, and the bolts inflict the same amount of damage as those launched by the wizard spell. But the poor sods shoot the missiles indiscriminately anytime their eyes are open. In battle, they're real nasty, but when it's time to leave the field, they've got to be blindfolded.

What's more, the sods can't see a bit, blindfolded or not. A lesser fiend's got to steer 'em around and guide their gazes so they cause the most damage. 'Course, baatezu being what they are, some of the guides lead their charges right to all the other baatezu who've angered them, using the missiles to avenge old insults. (Believe it or not, some of the guides actually get rewarded for this kind of inventive treachery.)

Promotion seems to cure the problem — the fiends' eyes return to normal as soon as they reach the next station in the hierarchy. But they lose one of the abilities of their new rank, seemingly at random.

Whatever fiend's running this experiment has decided to cancel it. Once all the current eye-missile baatezu die or get promoted, there won't be any left.

SPELLSLINGERS.

Most kinds of baatezu have natural spell-like powers, but they've never had the skill to learn spells from a book and cast 'em like a mortal spellslinger. And I hope they still don't. But the reports coming in are too numerous to toss onto the junkpile. Mind, I haven't seen any proof with my own eyes, but I've heard that certain baatezu wield what they call "learned magic" (to distinguish it from their natural spell-like abilities).

Word is the fiends have to sacrifice one or more of their natural powers in order to gain the use of spells. But even I'd say that's a good trade. I imagine the berks wear their spell components and such somewhere, thus being marked. But as I said, I haven't seen them myself, so I can't vouch for what such "fiend wizards" might look like.

◆ WEAKNESSES ◆

Rezzik Tam

I demanded that Nomoto Sinh let me handle this section of the chapter. I probably hate the baatezu more than anyone I know. Who better to investigate methods of killing the rotten monsters?

Listen: The creatures have two different kinds of vulnerability, physical and spiritual. A wise cutter will use both if he ever needs to face off against one of the fiends.

PHYSICAL VULNERABILITIES

The best way to physically harm a baatezu of any variety is with acid, electricity, or *magic missiles*. They can't seem to shrug off the damage from these sorts of attacks as easily as they can ignore poison or fire (or, to tell the truth, as easily as tanar'ri can). Cold, gaseous attacks, and sometimes even silver generally do about half the damage you might expect, so if you're fighting a baatezu with such weapons, be prepared to stand toe-to-toe with it longer than you would with an ordinary berk. But that really goes without saying.

Holy weapons tend to do the trick pretty well, too, but the monsters usually spot such items from a long way off. I heard one of them actually claim that holy weapons shed a kind of glow that they can see and even sense deep in their spirits. Hah! I've heard better lies from archons. But it is true that it's extraordinarily difficult to smuggle a holy weapon into the presence of baatezu (or fiends of other varieties) —

you might as well just announce your intentions flat out.

Holy water's effective as well, and I haven't heard any fast-talking monsters claim the stuff gives off a glow. However, don't douse a baatezu with holy water unless you've already managed to weaken the foul creature. If the monster's at full strength, the water won't hurt it much more than a mild acid would, and that only serves to set the fiend off like nothing else.

Finally, for the strong of heart, it's said that a sure method of getting rid of a fiend is to cut the thing apart and devour it. That's how the tanar'ri prevent lemures and nupperibos from regenerating during Blood War battles — they eat the mindless monsters. (If a baatezu's essence is ingested by another, it loses its existence.) But does that trick work on higher-ranking baatezu? It very well may, but chances are that only a fiendish stomach is up to the task. Besides, the taste of baatezu flesh isn't something you'd want to try twice — trust me, I know.



SPIRITUAL VULNERABILITIES

Most folks would rather try to kill a baatezu with a dull fork than take it on spiritually (or mentally, if you prefer). But remember: the monsters are inherently evil creatures, and I personally believe that the power of an evil mind is nothing compared to that of a good person standing against it. Remember this!

One way to engage a lawful fiend in mental combat is to act completely chaotically. Move without apparent purpose or plan; act on the spur of the moment. The average basher is so programmed that what he believes to be simple reflexes are really reactions he learned a long time ago. And reactions can be unlearned. However, if a baatezu gets a chance to study or question its foe to any degree — and the higher the baatezu, the less time it needs — the monster will have a decent read on its opponent's instincts and reflexes. In this case, chaotic behavior won't be effective against the fiend. The tactic works only if a baatezu and its foe have had little contact.

Another method exists for those who aren't keen on standing toe-to-toe with a baatezu. It's more dangerous, granted, but the rewards can be even greater. Simply try to convince the fiend that it's *wrong*. Sadly, there's no easy way to do this. The baatezu are taught throughout their entire lives that their way is the right way, and a mortal's arguments won't make them think twice — not unless he has a silver tongue and the luck of the gods.

My companions and I must have had the luck, because we once talked our way past a green abishai by demonstrating the persuasive power of chaos and the need for balance in the multiverse. We managed to confuse the monster for only a few minutes, but that was all we needed to escape. I don't think this tactic would work against a tougher or smarter type of baatezu.

Naturally, there are other ways to deal with the monsters that don't entail physical combat, but the baatezu try to learn of these avenues and close them as quickly as possible. The creatures hate being fooled, and they're determined never to be fooled by the same trick more than once. The baatezu learn from experience; if they didn't, they'd be just as bad off as the tanar'i.

THE TRUE DEATH

The baatezu claim to be immortal, that they'd live forever if they weren't troubled by little things like the tanar'i or mortals with holy swords. But even then, even when they die in combat, they expect us to believe that they're always reborn back on Baator.

Hah! If that were true, the fiends wouldn't need to worry about corrupting mortals and stealing their spirits to make larvae, would they? They'd never run out of baatezu, so they wouldn't need any new fodder. And do you really think that *any* of the baatezu creeping around today are the *original* monsters from the days of the beginning of all things? I suppose the mysterious Lords of the Nine may have lived that long, but for the most part, too much time has passed for any

of the original baatezu to exist (unless they've hidden themselves away so carefully and preserved their lives so cunningly that they've passed beyond mortal knowledge).

Of course, sometimes the baatezu truly *are* reborn. Those who die while on Baator are dead, pure and simple. But what about fiends who die while away from their home plane? Well, if they've been summoned or otherwise removed from the plane without having made a conscious choice to leave, they're reborn back on Baator (see "Banishment," below).

However, if they leave the plane of their own free will (and yes, obeying the orders of a superior is considered to be free will), they risk the true death. What that means is that if they're killed, they're dead. Forever. They'll never trouble good folks again.

Of course, a high-ranking monster's going to make sure it's protected from this kind of true death. The fiend might instruct an inferior to *gate* it to some other place or set up a special summoning that returns it to Baator after its foul mission is accomplished. Even in the Blood War, the commanders of a baatezu battle rarely meet the true death. They usually rely on advance scouts or trustworthy (in other words, well-paid) mortal spellslingers to *gate* or summon them to the fighting. Basically, fiends of cornugon station or higher try not to leave Baator under their own free will if they can help it (though sometimes they have no choice).

The fiends fear the true death more than most anything else. Unlike mortals, who can look forward to an afterlife of sorts, the baatezu have no idea what lies beyond for them. Some theorize that the fiends have an afterlife nearer to one of the primal forces, or that they move on closer to the truth (much as the Believers of the Source claim). My personal belief and hope is that nothing awaits the monsters but oblivion. But it's a great mystery, and the baatezu hate and fear being unable to plan for the uncertain. It goes against every instinct in their wretched bodies.

Oh, the fiends go to great lengths to cover up knowledge of the true death. They don't want any berk thinking they're afraid of what's beyond the veil, which may account for part of their bluster and braggadocio. They also don't want folks thinking that a baatezu can ever be killed permanently — it's a complex matter of posturing and attitude. The monsters try to present the toughest image possible. But that still doesn't forestall the eventuality of their deaths.

BANISHMENT

As I mentioned above, if a baatezu finds itself away from Baator without having made a deliberate choice to leave the plane, it's very likely safeguarded from the true death. Most of the fiends that're killed off-plane reform back on Baator; only the lemures and nupperibos stay slain.

You may wonder why I've grouped this power of rebirth among the *weaknesses* of the baatezu. It's because I see the situation for what it is: a banishment. If you kill a summoned barbazu on Arborea, its essence will no doubt return



to Baator and be reborn, but you will have banished it from the place it sought to defile.

What keeps the monster from heading for the nearest portal and resuming its battle with you? It depends on the type of fiend. Most of the lesser baatezu are reborn as nupperibos — the natural life form of Baator — and eventually reshaped into lemures and left to fight their way back up the ladder of promotion. These remade fiends don't regain their full memories until they reach their former stations, though there's no guarantee that they'll ever climb that high again.

Most of the higher-ranking baatezu come back as nupperibos, too, but they try to guard against that by leaving detailed instructions with their most loyal lieutenants on how to find them if they're ever killed and reborn. Usually, the more exceptional fiends (of erinyes rank or higher) serve just a short time as nupperibos until their lieutenants notice their absence and come looking for them in the hordes of the fleshy beasts.

Once a nupperibo is clearly identified as a former high-up, it's possible that the fiend will be restored to its previous station. It won't happen in an eyeblink, though. The nupperibo's still got to be reshaped into a lemur and then moved on up through the ranks, though the baatezu can speed the process along instead of waiting for the new fiend to prove its worth over and over again.

But even this is a risky business — fallen baatezu can serve for hundreds of years as nupperibos before they're found. What's more, I imagine that even baatezu have a hard time telling one nupperibo from another. That's why the higher fiends do their level best to make sure they're recognizable. Sometimes, though, the instructions left behind are deliberately "lost," and the fiends are left to scramble their way up the ladder again. Such is the nature of Baatorian politics. But, to the fiends, the scramble is better than the uncertainty of the true death.

SUMMONING ♦ +THE BAA+EZU ♦ *Nomoto Sinh*

Popular tales say the baatezu cannot enter the Upper Planes or the Prime Material Plane without being summoned in specific rituals that bind them for

nine days or nine hours, depending on the strength of the fiend. But here's the truth of the matter: The baatezu are as free to walk the planes as the tanar'ri. They always have been. It's likely that they always will be.

But occasionally, their superiors decree otherwise, making pacts and promises to keep a certain number of fiends at certain places for certain periods of time (though only the powers know why). At such times, the

common baatezu are restricted from roaming the planes at will. And no baatezu in its right mind would gainsay orders from Baator's high-ups, not unless it could bring those superiors crashing down with that one act of rebellion. (Erinyes are an exception, as my fiendish contact smugly informed me, free to journey to other planes whether they've been summoned or not.) The creatures must either obey or invite the wrath of those who issue the orders, not to mention the legions of fiends that follow the commanders. That's a formidable obstacle to most baatezu, and only the exceptionally stupid or exceptionally brave try to cross it.

Some do, of course, and they visit the Prime or the Upper Planes even when forbidden to do so. These fiends never return to Baator, not unless they can prove that what they accomplished was worth foreswearing the baatezu lords. As that's usually impossible, the wanderers often turn toward chaos or join the ranks of the risen (though some continue to pursue the ideals of law and evil on the Prime).

Of course, such deviants are the exception. That's why many of the baatezu who are *truly* summoned to the Prime exchange their services for the privilege of hunting down their "traitorous" fellows. They don't want the errant fiends giving baatezu everywhere a bad name.

HOW TO CALL THEM

In my research, I stumbled across no lack of bубbers who promised to teach me "the multiverse's best summoning spell" for the price of a drink. No doubt a few of their stories had some grain of truth, but those methods are, at best, dangerously unproven. Mages who wish to call baatezu should rely on more widely known methods (as described in the introduction to this very book).

Sadly, most of the common summoning spells have been designed so that even a rank amateur can work them (though poorly). The consequences of an improperly cast summoning can devastate untold miles of the Prime. And there's always a chance that a spellslinging berk manages to grab one of the rare fiends who sees an improper summoning as an excuse for carnage (though the danger is less with baatezu than with tanar'ri). Stories tell of a mageling who inadvertently released a single barbazu on her prime-material world. The fiend *gated* in its brethren to lay waste to the land, and they did so with relish. By the time a pit fiend finally came through to call back the renegades, the barbazu had destroyed over half the world.

Two different types of summonings work on baatezu. The first calls a fiend by name, drawing it from its tasks without care or regard for that work. A baatezu so summoned is almost always furious for having been pulled away from its duties. Abandoning a task set by its superiors is one of the worst crimes a baatezu can commit; drawing a fiend away from its own schemes is one of the worst insults a summoner can offer. Since baatezu are always involved in a task or a scheme, it's hardly likely that a mage will catch one in a good mood — unless the fiend's manipulating the fool for its own purposes.

The second kind of summoning draws from a pool of

potential candidates, administered by Furcas (the member of the Dark Eight in charge of mortal relations). As might be expected, Baator's high-ups have determined the spots where spell crystals — those objects that grab a summoned creature and whisk it to the summoner — are likely to appear from points all over the multiverse. They position various baatezu at the most important of these points. (Naturally, what's considered "important" really depends on what fiendish faction holds power at the time, and the number and type of baatezu manning the entry points changes practically day by day.)

When a spell crystal eventually appears, a fiend leaps into its path and is summoned to the location of the spell-slinger. Naturally, the baatezu stationed at the crystal entry points are briefed on what agendas to pursue once they arrive at their destination. For the most part, they've got tremendous latitude in determining how to achieve their goals, but their every action reflects on baatezu all over the multiverse. Those who fail in their missions or who bring shame to the race are due for torment. That's what makes fiends summoned by this method more than a little uneasy in their appointed duties.

HOW TO CONTROL THEM

Controlling a summoned baatezu is risky at best. Though they're proscribed from action by the summoning circles any intelligent mage puts down when calling outer-planar beings, the more talented among them can talk their way out of nearly any situation. It might just be Baatorian bluster, but I've heard that some fiends have been summoned so often that they know, by sight, the races of over a hundred prime-material worlds — and the weaknesses of each.

Thus, if a mortal hopes to control a summoned baatezu, he'd best make sure to triple-check every single seal and to phrase his request such that the creature can find no loopholes. The baatezu are masters of manipulation; they find the smallest chink in any protection, magical or verbal, and exploit it as much as they possibly can. They'll seek to spread their evil as far as they can, as long as it promotes general goals of the race. If all else fails, they'll follow instructions so literally that the summoner will wish he'd never dealt with them in the first place.

Another, more insidious trick applies more specifically to recurrent summoners. The fiends allow openings in contracts to slip by, taking advantage of only the most glaring holes. When the spellcaster has debased himself with enough summonings to fully ensnare himself in a net of evil, *then* the baatezu strike and bring the berk down.

(This is why most contracts — even those between reputable merchants in The Lady's Ward — are weighed down with fine print. Obviously, it's meant to protect the signer from trickery, to close loopholes that might otherwise be exploited, and so on. But the practice actually grew out of dealing with the baatezu. They're the lords of legalities and tiny details; ignore this at your peril.)

Here's the most important thing to remember: Sum-

moned baatezu, even if completely bound by abjurations and holy symbols, will always try to exchange their services instead of providing them for free. Most summoners (especially novices) fall for this ruse; the fiend provides a service, and the summoner must provide one in return. Whatever the fiend asks for never fails to advance the goals of the baatezu or wrap the summoner in a web of lies, magic, and evil that ends only when the spellcaster has become a lemmur on Baator. (Canny mortals know they don't have to trade services at all; they simply make their demands of the fiends.)

The best advice for making deals with the baatezu is simply to leave them alone. But if a spellcaster happens to summon a fiend that's not all that smart, he can extort promises from the hapless creature. And all baatezu are bound to honor the lawful agreements entered into by any member of their race, even if said member has been tricked. The deals made by outcasts don't count, obviously, but a bargain offered by an abishai will bind even one of the Dark Eight. (Of course, the high-up will examine the agreement very carefully and exploit any flaws it finds, but still...)

◆ DEALING WITH MORTALS ◆

Regnus Roy

In all the digging I've done for this project, I've found dozens of fragments of text from primes detailing their encounters with fiends. And sure as Sigil, in every one the baatezu go to considerable lengths to make a strong impression. They figure by assaulting a berk's senses, they can make him feel the power of their race, make him know the dread at the core of dabbling with dark forces.

Here's a piece I found in a dusty book called *The Black Beyond*:

... My chalked circle complete, I awaited the coming of the fiend said to have terrorized this place for so long. I did not have long to wait.

A coursing of electricity along the lines of the symbol presaged its coming. The stench of nether realms wafted across the room as the maw to a hellish pit gaped ever wider to disgorge its ponderous cargo. I gagged, my sight growing blurry with the acrid vapors, and through my tearing vision, I saw the approach of this creature. It came, not through the air as an ordinary beast might, but through the corners of space itself, traveling from an unimaginable distance and growing at a tremendous speed.

At last the fiend stood within my circle, barely contained by the lines. Its eyes, pig-red and malev-

olent, gazed out at me with such cunning calculation that, for an instant, I feared I had somehow served its purpose in drawing it here. I shook that thought from my mind and began the abjuration that would drive it forever into oblivion.

Inside the circle, the creature stifled a yawn. Its leathery wings unfurled behind it, their immense span creaking as they spread slowly, filling the cellar, and then—

It stepped from the circle.

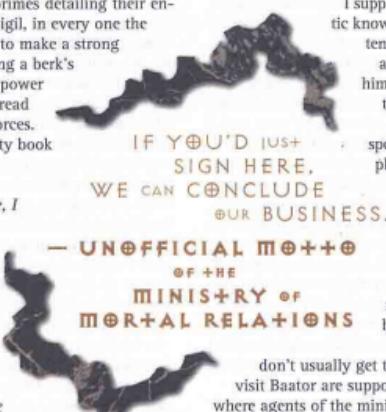
'Course, some primes know what they're doing, but planars have a better grasp on dealing with the appearance of a fiend. A spellslinger's already lost the battle if he goes all barney when the thing shows up in his castle — he called it, for powers' sake, so he'd better be ready to handle it! That don't mean chewing it out, either. A canny blood recognizes the danger of a fiend and treats it with respect.

What do baatezu think of mortals? For the most part, the same thing mortals think of flies: Ignore 'em, but swat 'em if they're a bother. Even the life of an elf — thousands of years long — ain't much more than a day or a week to a fiend. Sure, mortals are tenacious and very, very prolific, but they're too weak to take on even one of the fiendish races. They're insects; they're vermin. But that don't mean they can't be exploited and then tossed aside.

I suppose if a cutter's gained some fantastic knowledge or power (or if he has the potential to gain it, which the fiends usually recognize), a baatezu might treat him with a bit more respect. That's why the Dark Eight set up the Ministry of Mortal Relations — to deal with the special cases that need more than simple swatting (though the ministry still tries to leave mortal sods with the taste of betrayal one way or another). Under the eye of Furcas, the ministry's supposed to govern all contact with mortals, and the fiends sent out on summonings (or wanderings) are briefed before they leave Baator.

Baatezu who stay at home don't usually get the same training. See, mortals who visit Baator are supposed to stick to certain paths, places where agents of the ministry can work their charms on 'em. 'Course, what with all the portals in Sigil (and elsewhere), it's likely that some folks just slip through the cracks — and that's when they get a true glimpse of how hellish Baator really is.

It's not hard for baatezu to communicate with mortals. They know many languages, and if that fails, they can use telepathy. When they do, their thoughts simply translate into the language of the listener. But since they think in their own caste languages (see "Language," later in this chapter) and in the horrid concepts and metaphors of evil,



the listener can't help but hear a low, terrifying buzz in the background of the telepathic message. If the fiend makes the effort, it can screen out most of the "static," but few of 'em bother with this nicely.

Common chant is that baatezu take control of the bodies of mortals so they can spread the word of evil across the multiverse without fear of discovery. That's barney talk. Sure, a fiend might plant seeds of itself in a soul's mind, and it could use magic to take over if it wanted to, but what'd be the point? No, the baatezu're too subtle to take complete possession of mortal bodies. They leave that kind of rough stuff to the tanar'ri.

All this talk of bodies reminds me of something the faint of heart ain't going to like: Baatezu sometimes breed with mortals. It's not as rare an occurrence as most folks'd like to think; it seems the fiends go out of their way to produce offspring with other races. But I don't know what one of these baatezu-mortal children looks like, because I've never seen one up close and personal. However, it's practically a given that these half-baatezu do exist. Otherwise, how would we ever get tieflings with Baatorian blood, which are (at most) one-quarter baatezu?

◆ THE DARK EIGHT ◆

Nomoto Sinh

I had no trouble convincing my erinyes "friend" to regale me with the story of the formation of the Dark Eight, a tale which has since passed into legend (and must thus be considered suspect).

Long ago, she said, a great and wise pit fiend named Cantrum saw the necessity of further order in the ranks of the baatezu, and he gathered together eight like-minded brethren. The combined force of nine ambitious and extremely well-organized pit fiends yielded a new pattern for success through discipline.

Apparently, there's some debate on Baator as to whether the group grew from an idea by the Lords of the Nine, or whether they took the initiative on their own. It's no secret that some of them rose through the ranks in the service of the lords. In any case, the Dark Nine (as they were then called) became the driving force of the race, a sort of guild mediating between the whims of the noble baatezu (and the lords) and the needs of the common baatezu.

Then one day, Cantrum fell to the blade of an assassin. Most say the killer was a paladin, though some fiends swear it was an abishai. No matter; Cantrum died. Rather than try to replace their priceless founder (which they feared they could never do), the remaining pit fiends renamed their circle the Dark Eight, though they swore to honor always the memory of their leader.

That's the story as told in Baatorian society, anyway. My contact says the Dark Eight learned a lesson from Cantrum's fate and protected themselves against the kind of assassination and intrigue that characterizes the rest of baatezu society. In other words, the pit fiends who currently

call themselves the Dark Eight are supposedly the *same* pit fiends who came together under Cantrum. I very much doubt that. But if they truly are the originals, they're unique beings among the treacherous baatezu. And if they play at politics and rivalries (which they must!), they keep their struggles hidden from mortal eyes.

Each of the Dark Eight watches over one of the ministries of baatezu culture; here are the fiends' names and duty designations: Baalzephon, Supply Master of Baator; Corin, Spymaster; Dagos, Marshall of the Pits; Furcas, Minister of Mortal Relations; Pearza, Chief of Research; Zaebos, Minister of Promotions; Zapan, Minister of Immortal Diplomacy; and Zimimar, Minister of Morale.

The prestige and influence of the Dark Eight are at least equal to those of the noble baatezu that serve the lords. However, the Eight remain ordinary pit fiends, while the nobles assume greater physical power and greater proximity to the true masters of the plane. Still, few mortals are foolish enough to test the limits of the Eight. They can reach to most places across the multiverse, and as the heads of the ministries of Baator, they have access to more information than almost any living creatures on the planes. It's best not to cross them.

◆ NOBLE BAATEZU ◆

Tealo Wilton

For a long time, it's been thought that there was no step between the "ordinary" baatezu (perhaps a better word would be "nongodlike") and the Lords of the Nine. But my own painstaking research has rewarded me with the dark of the matter: An elusive group of baatezu exists above the rest of the race, nobles who directly serve the lords. Apparently, the lords shape them from pit fiends who've served the interests of Baator exceptionally well (and who've also managed to secure power for themselves in doing so). The Lords of the Nine appreciate that sort of devotion, and they reward it with service of a higher kind — service that entails more responsibility and more personal gratification.

It's important to note that these noble baatezu actually rank *above* the Dark Eight in terms of status (and likely power). And if any of the Eight grumble about the arrangement, they keep it to themselves. It may well be that rarest of things in Baator: a deal that's mutually advantageous to all sides.

Though I've not met any Baatorian nobles, I gather (from lower-planar chant) that these special fiends can choose individual forms, that they focus on a particular area of expertise and alter themselves to fit their specialties. Why, I suppose this means I may have met a noble or two after all and simply not realized it.

Is this individuality a mark of chaos? No more than a secundus modron is chaotic. Though the modron has a form that only three others duplicate, a secundus is still a creature of law. So it is with the nobles of Baator — they have form and individual desire, but they promote the laws of the land. And if they create rules to benefit themselves, what of it? They have the power, and more importantly, they have the

right. They've paid their dues in millennia of labor for the causes of law and evil, and they deserve to reap the rewards of that service.

As a baatezu progresses from lemure to pit fiend, its name grows in length and complexity as its power increases. Once it achieves the status of noble, its name is again simplified, but that doesn't mean the fiend is any less troublesome to call or control. Many mortals recognize this fact, and as a result, the names of noble baatezu are more often used to summon and bind lesser fiends ("In the name of Amduscias, the Horned Duke, and Caerkrinolaas of the Seventh Quarter, I call thee forth . . ."). Only a fool would use a noble's name to call the noble itself.

The nobles are not the culmination of Baatorian politics, however. Though they may sit above the Dark Eight, they answer to the Lords of the Nine, the rulers of the layers of Baator. Chant is each lord has a covey of nobles at its beck and call. Each noble, of course, commands armies of baatezu and sends them against its lord's enemies (and never forget that armies can be used in more ways than simple physical battle).

As for the lords themselves, well . . . I regret that I wasn't chosen to expound on them at length, but I place you into the hopefully capable hands of one of my compatriots.

◆ THE LORDS OF +THE NINE◆

Regnus Roy

Plenty of myths surround the Lords of the Nine. Some folks say they're arch-fiends, risen from the ranks below them to dominate the layers of Baator. Other graybeards claim they're really yugoloths (I swear, some folks see 'loths everywhere they look). There's even a group that thinks the lords grew up from the very essence of Baator itself and are the living manifestations of the plane's will.

Is any of it true? Who knows? The lords keep most of the facts about themselves dark; the less folks know of 'em, the better. Still, it doesn't prevent tenacious mortals from digging up whatever they can. Take Willgan the Dogged, for instance. That blood gathered together more material than nearly any other. 'Course, the baatezu say his sources were corrupt, and Willgan ain't available for questions – he's vanished.

Anyway, here's what we *do* know about the lords. They're mighty, maybe even mightier than the deities of Baator. They're partly creatures of symbology as well as physical form, so their natures change bit by bit over the millennia. They've hidden the truth about themselves behind countless walls, giving different names and showing different aspects to almost every berk who asks, so that no one can truly label them. Like powers, they can manifest avatars and choose their forms for best effect.

The lords shape the layers of Baator in their own image and police their territory better than the Harmonium ever could. They command handfuls of noble baatezu and armies of common baatezu, and they use their underlings' power to amass ever more influence for themselves. And though they're

bitter rivals, they recognize the need for diplomacy and alliances now and again to keep Baator strong against outsiders.

What else? Well, the lords don't give a fig about the Blood War, leaving it all in the hands of the Dark Eight. They simply rule the nine layers of Baator. They also make pacts with leatherheads on the Prime Material Plane, promising strength, wealth, and sometimes immortality to those who follow their tenets. They build civilizations and crush empires. They are, in short, never to be messed with.

That's all I can say with certainty. Anything else is just guesswork. 'Course, some guesses are better than others, and the chant below is a collection of the most compelling evidence ever found. But mind where you take this information, berk – flap your bone-box too loudly in the wrong places and you'll wind up in the dead-book for sure.

LORD OF +THE FIRST+

The unnamed Lord of the First was deposed thousands of years ago by Bel, her pit fiend warlord. Bel was an ambitious general under the command of the Dark Eight, and he gathered enough power from the armies of Avernum to knock the lord out of power. Now, he's more or less taken over her spot. Lots of folks today don't even know a different Lord of the First ever existed – they just figure it's always been Bel.

His servants include the dukes Amduscias, Malphas, and Goap. They too are warlords and generals.

LORD OF +THE SECOND+

It's no dark that the Lord of the Second is the Archduke Disperater, an urbane fiend who goes to great lengths to make sure everyone knows he's in command of any situation. He's as cruel and manipulative as they come, but he also recognizes the need for goodwill with other planars. Merchants are often welcome in his iron city, Dis, though the burg's scalding walls scorch anyone addle-coved enough to brush into them. Of all the lords, Disperater is the most visible to mortals across the planes.

His numerous servants include erinyes and several dukes. The most notable of these is Titivillus, Disperater's messenger and herald.

LORD OF +THE THIRD+

Common chant marks the Lord of the Third as a bloated slug that prattles on and on about the virtue of greed and jink. That's just barmy talk; folks're probably confusing the third lord with the seventh. See, the third layer, Minauros, is a sodding swamp, and it seems far more likely that its lord is really the snake-bodied Viscount also called Minauros (a dead giveaway, if you ask me).

The Viscount is known to have had the pit fiend Zimimar in his service – that is, until Cantrum made Zimimar a member of the Dark Eight. Minauros's consort is the duchess Glasya, and the current commander of his armies is Duke Morsch.

LORD OF THE FOURTH

This one's sometimes called the Lord of Pain and Suffering. That ain't hard to believe when a body looks at Phlegethos, the fiery fourth layer of Baator. The main sticking point with this lord is about gender, of all things. Some say that he's a darkly handsome, red-skinned male, while others put forth that she's really a woman of incredible beauty with fire dancing in her eyes. Lord, lady — either way, the ruler's said to be one of the vainest bloods on the Lower Planes.

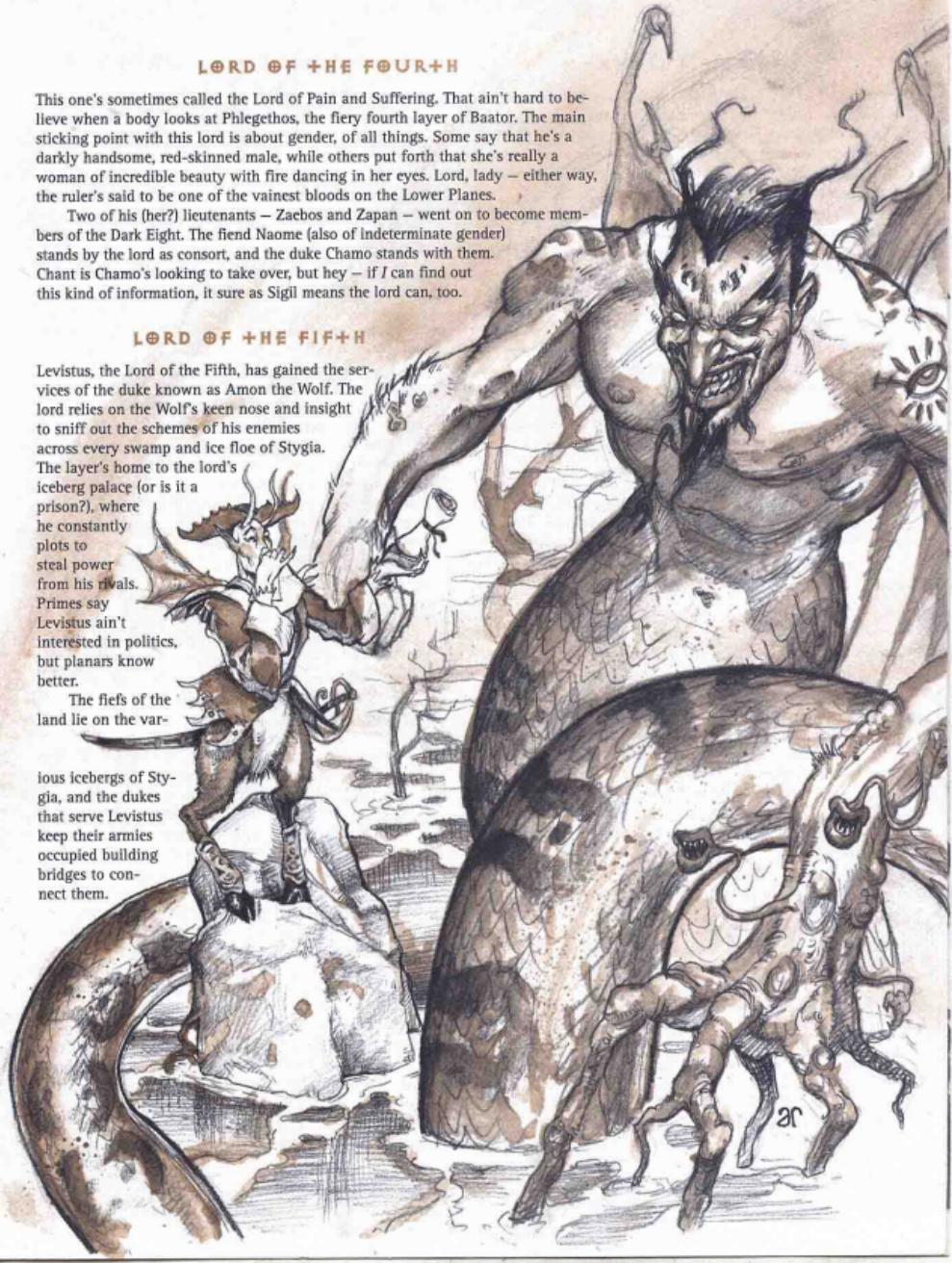
Two of his (her?) lieutenants — Zaeboh and Zapan — went on to become members of the Dark Eight. The fiend Naome (also of indeterminate gender) stands by the lord as consort, and the duke Chamo stands with them. Chant is Chamo's looking to take over, but hey — if I can find out this kind of information, it sure as Sigil means the lord can, too.

LORD OF THE FIFTH

Levistus, the Lord of the Fifth, has gained the services of the duke known as Amon the Wolf. The lord relies on the Wolf's keen nose and insight to sniff out the schemes of his enemies across every swamp and ice floe of Stygia. The layer's home to the lord's iceberg palace (or is it a prison?), where he constantly plots to steal power from his rivals. Primes say Levistus ain't interested in politics, but planars know better.

The fiefs of the land lie on the var-

ious icebergs of Stygia, and the dukes that serve Levistus keep their armies occupied building bridges to connect them.



LORD OF THE SIXTH

The Lord of the Sixth is commonly portrayed as a hag countess armed with a huge sword and the ability to bring avalanches down on the heads of her enemies. This wicked countess – usually called Malagard – loves to lure mortals and powerful planar creatures to the layer, only to destroy them among the crushing rocks of Malbolge.

It's well known that Malagard and Bileth (her pit fiend tribune) travel regularly through the layer, making surprise visits to the bronze citadels to see how the structures hold up against the torrents of stone.

LORD OF THE SEVENTH

Triel the Fallen, the Slug Archduke, the Lord of the Flies – these are all names for the Lord of the Seventh. Chant is he was once an archon who got tossed from Mount Celestia and made a home in Maladomini. Whatever he is, his bloated shape oozes about the cities of the layer, seeking the combination of perfect form and function in the crumbling burgs.

The dukes Abigor and Zephar lead their armies through Maladomini, standing watch against their master's enemies (and driving all pit fiends from the layer – Triel sees them as spies and puppets of the dark Lord of the Ninth). The herald Neabaz spreads the word of the great Slug, and the numerous flies of the decaying layer act as his eyes and ears.

LORD OF THE EIGHTH

The reports of the Lord of the Eighth are mixed. Some hold that he's a grossly fat berk who waddles for cover whenever a basher with real power comes by; others maintain that he's a handsome giant with blue-black skin. All folks agree that his name is Molikroth, that he calls himself the Baron of Cania, that he's utterly without mercy, and that he hates the Lord of the Ninth.

Molikroth's servants are the dukes Nexo and Hutjin, who command companies of pit fiends. His chamberlain is the relatively weak noble Barbas, who revels in his association with the powerful lord.

LORD OF THE NINTH

The Lord of the Ninth has masked his, her, or its existence entirely. All we know is that he carries a powerful ruby rod and that he's the Overlord of all the other layers' lords. They don't dare move against him. See, the Overlord controls Nessus, the deepest pit of Baator, where the sheer crackle of lawful evil is most concentrated. The Dark Eight certainly agree; I've even heard tales that the fortress Malsheen, where the Dark Eight hold court, is also the home of the Overlord.

The servants of the Overlord are unknown, but whispers claim the Executioner of Baator, Alastor the Grim, serves the mysterious lord unquestioningly.

◆ CHAOS AND PURITY ◆

Tealo Wilton

As our fair editor detailed earlier, Baatorian society consists of three primary castes – least, lesser, and greater – which are the basic building blocks of the culture. Why, any member of the race has the chance to ascend to the level of greater baatezu and beyond. You must admit (as do I, and freely) that the fiends enjoy a *remarkably* just society. Of course, it's also strictly regimented. A baatezu just has to learn how to play in it.

Again, as noted earlier, each of the three castes is further broken down into various stations. Every baatezu from spinagon up must learn exactly how much deference to pay to each rank. Too much, and it'll get flayed for insulting sarcasm; too little, and it'll be torn apart for base insolence. When dealing with a baatezu of a higher caste, naturally, it learns to bow and scrape. It may have plots in place for elevating itself, but only the dimmest of fiends tips its hand to a superior before setting those plans in motion.

But the baatezu hierarchy is more than just an artificial ranking system. Many people may think it so, but I know better. I've done the research. I've read the books. Why, I've *written* the books! What I've found is this: The slow process of promotion and ascension actually culls the curse of chaos from the spirits that come to Baator.

Written in the introduction to *The Libram of Dust* is this passage:

None come to us but those who have chosen to come to us. We do not take the cast-offs or the refuse of other planes. Those who would join our terrible service must first prove themselves worthy. If we tempt, we do so only to grant understanding. If they fall, they fall willingly.

So it is, then, that the lowest of the baatezu still carry some of the taint of chaos (and perhaps even of good) in their spirits. Their true purification doesn't begin until they're chosen to ascend beyond the status of lemure. Of course, this takes time. Chaos is one of the fundamental forces of the multiverse, and it takes more than simple evolution to breed that out of a soul.

Do you follow? That's why lower-ranking baatezu occasionally get away with chaotic acts and periods of disobedience. Still and all, those who don't disobey (except when they can topple their superiors by doing so) rise far more quickly in Baatorian society than those who do. In short, the high-ups expect all baatezu to live by the rules; the hierarchy rewards those who work for it and punishes those who don't.

The aim of the fiendish structure – to expunge chaos from the spirit – is most effective when those involved give in to the sheer *inevitability* of the matter. Baatezu, like mortals, rise the highest when they embrace the ideal (I myself am proof of that). Pit fiends have chosen to reject chaos in its entirety and have proven subtle and brutal enough to eliminate others who pretend to greater purity. Most people

say the baatezu are concerned only with corruption, but they also seek the cleanliness of pure conviction, and that's what rising through the ranks is all about.

The reward for purity is threefold: possible membership in the Dark Eight (though few baatezu dare suspect this reward even exists); power over vast armies of lesser baatezu and the fame that accompanies this; and the shaping of the very multiverse with new policies and influence that few mortals can comprehend. Still, I'll be happy to try to explain it all to you some other time.

THE ROGUES ◆ AND THE RISEN ◆

Regnus Roy

Every now and again, a baatezu of whatever rank'll break its training and flee the confines of its lawful society. These berks are the *rogues*, and they're as hated by the rest of the baatezu as rogue modrons are by the clockwork armies of Mechanus. Their former fellows'll do whatever they can to bring 'em down, sometimes even hunting them across the planes. Zimimar of the Dark Eight, Minister of Morale, even sends her own agents after fiends who turn stag, to show 'em that no one's beyond the reach of the baatezu arm. Most of the deserters wind up swinging from the gibbets of Bel's castle in Avernum.

Why do the berks flee their posts? Well, some of 'em can't stand the discipline for one minute longer, and others just give in to the chaos they secretly nurture in their

breasts. (It ain't always boiled out of 'em.) Rarest of all are the leatherheads who give themselves over to the forces of good — the celestials of the Upper Planes. Baatezu who follow this path're called the *risen*.

See, just as the archons can fall from grace, so can baatezu climb up out of the pit. Sure, some of 'em might be double agents, running a peel to gain valuable chant or trick the celestials into lending the fiends a hand. But as sure as Sigil, there're definitely some baatezu who've sincerely given up their evil ways and now struggle to make up for their past sins. And the risen have proven to be plenty useful to the forces of good.

Don't misunderstand, berk — the Upper Planes aren't swarming with reformed baatezu. They're few and far between, and they don't normally gather in close company. After all, how does one risen fiend know if another is truly changed, or just an assassin out for his skin? Better to steer clear of each other, they figure.

Still, there's one cutter, the most prominent of all the risen, who can bring 'em together when needed: K'rand Vahlrix, a male hamatula. A do-gooder who organizes other reformed fiends into the celestial armies, he coordinates any missions where they have to work closely with archons, aasimon, and the like. More importantly, he sees to it that traitors and would-be assassins don't get far. K'rand ain't forthcoming about his past, but there's no two ways about it — he's surely cut his ties with his homeland. Chant is he killed his cornugon superior and fled to Bytopia before coming to the notice of the forces there.



SEE, BECAUSE

I BE+RAYED Y@U,
YOU LEARNED +@ TRUS+ NO ONE.
NO EVEN YOUR FRIENDS,
AND THAT GO+ Y@U
A PROMOTION.
YOU OWE ME ONE.

— S+ERANO DAI'EL, ABISHAI,
+@ DWANA MAAREEN,
NEW ERINYES

'Course, it seems like some creatures of goodness won't ever learn to trust a changed baatezu fully.

"Can't take the fire out of the fiend," they say. Fact is, some folks think the

baatezu're at least partly evil by

nature. Just as a yeth hound remains a carnivore, so must a baatezu remain a monster of evil. But then they look at some of the reformed baatezu, and they've got to wonder at their own lack of faith in the power of good.

◆ A SOCIETY OF BETRAYAL ◆

Rezzik Tam

Although it's strange to think of vile monsters forming any kind of society, the baatezu definitely have one. And here's the most important thing to remember about it: The common fiends don't make the rules; they just play by them. Naturally, they struggle to ascend so they can be in a position to change the rules to suit themselves. But when they finally reach the rank they so covet, they discover that the status quo is nearly perfect for their needs and desires. Typical.

Of course, what can we expect from a society based on lies, betrayal, and one-upsmanship? Sparked by envy, greed, and hate, the baatezu scheme and plan their whole long lives, looking to rise through the ranks at the expense of others. What they can't use to climb to a higher status, they tear down, just so it then can't be used against them. Their lives are rigorous and ordered, yes, but they still live in fear that they might not have covered their tracks as well as they could have after committing their latest wrong. Leaving evidence behind is said to be one of the worst crimes a baatezu can commit.

Fiends who excel at treachery and backstabbing rise high, and quickly at that. Such qualities are exactly the sort prized by their superiors, for they're the ideals that advance the baatezu race. Those who can't learn these lessons are doomed to wallow in low-ranking stations forever — if they're not sent to a painful death at the front lines of the Blood War, that is.

Still, despite this atmosphere of distrust, the monsters do have allies — if you can call them that. These "friends" are more common at the lower levels of the baatezu hierarchy, but as a fiend travels up the ladder, its allies become fewer and fewer. Unless its companions ascend equally and into spots that don't threaten its rank, a baatezu faces a constant danger of betrayal from them — especially if they can profit from the treachery. Sometimes a fiend will turn on one of its fellows just to see if it can get away with it. After all, the best and brightest

want to test themselves, right?

In the lowest ranks, betrayals generally occur because of perceived slights, the lack of communication, the lack of ability to see another's point of view, and (of course) the desire to advance. It's usually not until later in a baatezu's life — at green abishai station and above — that the monster realizes it can rise further and faster if it *plans* the betrayals, if it carefully schemes to better itself at the expense of its brethren.

Know what I think? I think some of the most powerful and cunning baatezu are those who trusted too much in their earliest days, that they became so hardened because of particularly painful treacheries from those they relied on the most. Look at it this way: Imagine a life spanning thousands of years. Imagine the most wrenching betrayals of a human lifetime and extend those across millennia. Imagine what sort of person a body'd become without trust, without even the *hope* of trust, to keep him going.

Don't get me wrong — I'm not saying we should feel sorry for the baatezu. Hah! They bring the misery on themselves. Their betrayals foster further treacheries, and they become so enamored of their own smug "perfection" of their refusal to face the fact that they too are fallible, that they practically invite hatred and disdain. In short, they get nothing they don't deserve.

The real kicker is that the superiors encourage and sometimes even create the betrayals. When a high-ranking baatezu sees a lesser fiend with promise, it often manipulates the monster's allies into astonishing acts of treachery. Why? Just to teach the up-and-coming fiend that there's no one it can trust, that a baatezu must always rely on itself for solace and comfort.

That's right. Powerful baatezu take weaker members of their race under their wings, so to speak, to instill in them — in the most cruel and brutal manner possible — the best way to get ahead in the cosmos. The approaches to this vary, but most baatezu treat their inferiors like so much dung. The underlings with strength of will can rise above that and strike out on their own. Those without it are relegated to lowly positions for the rest of their careers.

An intelligent fiend keeps its ear to the ground, alert for any sign of unrest or hatred among those who covet its position. But it's got to watch above as well as below, to guard against whatever unpleasantness its superiors might have in mind and to see how best to drive the overlords from their lofty perches. Of course, the fiend must also keep an eye on

its inferiors' inferiors, who may plot to topple it so that promotions come through all around. And let's not forget the superiors' superiors, . . .

YOU'RE RIGHT,
I DO, OLD FRIEND.
I DO.

— DWANA MAAREEN'S
RESPONSE,

SHOR+LY BEFORE
DAI'EL'S EXECUTION

It's a mad labyrinth, and what it boils down to is this: The fiends do their best to make sure they've placed spies and informants anywhere their rivals might lurk, and they know that rivals lurk *everywhere*. The fellowship that many on the Middle and Upper Planes take for granted is in tremendously short supply. As the saying goes, "There's more water in a thimble than trust on Baator."

◆ LANGUAGE ◆ *Tealo Wilton*

As highly advanced creatures, the baatezu have quite naturally developed a highly evolved and complicated language. Language is life, after all, and the laws of Baator govern speech just as much as they govern behavior. Why, the Baatorian tongue even *reflects* baatezu society in that it's broken into different castes, with each successive level adding more complexity and malevolence in its order. Within the language of each caste, the different stations use different inflections, so that an abishai's speech, say, is markedly different from an osyluth's.

The baatezu themselves know (or will admit to knowing) only the languages of their station or those below it; a fiend caught speaking a tongue of a higher station is punished for insolence. Of course, knowing a smattering of the higher languages allows a lesser fiend to eavesdrop and perhaps gain knowledge that will help it advance in rank.

I have, of course, mastered the subtleties of Baatorian language, but few mortals need to bother trying to mimic my incredible feat. Better to learn the standard trade jargon of the planes, with which most fiends are familiar. Still, a general understanding of the different levels of the language is a worthy goal.

THE CASTES OF SPEECH

The baatezu language has four official divisions, and though each expresses different concepts and uses different words, they're all based on the same foundation. The entire structure is such that the speaker *always* expresses its dominance, equality, or subordination to the listener. I find that it's quite impossible to tell or perceive the whole of any matter when using this tongue — it always seems to snake its way around the truth.

The first division is the language of the least baatezu (or, more accurately, of the spinagons, as neither lemures nor nupperibos speak). It's used to convey simple commands and concepts and also to mock others by implying the listener's stupidity and dimwitted ways. This variation is a harsh tongue, almost a rough barking, ideally suited for shouting commands across a battlefield.

The second division is the language of the lesser baatezu, and it's surely the equal of any prime-material tongue in complexity. Used to communicate more abstract concepts such as hate and honor, this variation is the first in which the language begins to ooze malevolence and take on

a recognizable form. The pattern is easily discernible, yet quite tricky to duplicate for anyone not fully immersed in the culture. This "lesser tongue" isn't as gravelly as that of the least baatezu but it's still far from mellifluous. It's also the language most nonbaatezu learn when they study Baatorian speech.

The third division — stilted and formal, grating yet melodic — is spoken exclusively by the greater baatezu. It's full of patterns that emerge only over the course of a conversation, seemingly going nowhere and suddenly coming to a conclusion. Use of the language requires forethought, planning, and the ability to lead the listener with only the smallest of cues. Chant that two greater baatezu can hold an entire conversation with this language by only speaking the beginnings of their sentences. (Personally, I believe this is how telepathy developed in the race.) The "greater tongue" is used to impress the lesser baatezu and is nearly impossible for a mortal to learn.

The least, lesser, and greater variations all evolve gradually into the court language of Baator, a tongue used only by pit fiends and the nobles of the lords. The court language spills over with designs of evil that move almost beyond the edge of comprehension, patterns with terrifying eddies that can drag a listener downward into hateful despair. Supposedly, the written form of this tongue — the circular logic and expressive symbols of the highest baatezu laid bare — is the elegant line used to draw a summoning circle, the boundaries delineating the fiend's powers. Let me explain that in simpler terms: It's only a well-constructed argument that keeps a summoned fiend from ravaging a spellcaster. Take care when chalking your summoning circles.

No matter which variation is spoken, the baatezu language is one of bewildering complexity. The noises uttered often appear to bear no relation to one another, instead sounding like a combination of a barking hound, an eloquent verse, the squeal of slate and steel, and the subtle smell of hatred. Of course, the overall sound varies, depending on the speaker and on what's being said. But in all situations, the sound of the language being used aloud is cause for fright.

◆ CULTURE ◆ *Tealo Wilton*

What, two sections in a row penned by my illustrious hand? It seems that our fair editor knows who is best qualified to write at length on the baatezu. Indeed, one reason I accepted this assignment was to have the opportunity to show the multiverse that the baatezu aren't the simple, savage, ruthless creatures they're often made out to be. Quite the reverse! Why, they're some of the most advanced beings in the cosmos. As proof, I point to a mere handful of examples of their fine culture.

(For a close look at a typical baatezu city, please refer to the description and rough map of the City of Man, found at the end of this chapter.)

Like many other aspects of baatezu life, their architecture incorporates a disturbing array of concepts. The odd style is best described with the adjectives *brooding*, *dangerous*, and *looming*. Something about Baatorian building makes the viewer feel that it's going to lurch into unwholesome life at any moment. For those of you familiar with the wards of Sigil, the architecture is much like the proudest stuff of the Hive: spiky and protruding, with blades seeming to jut from every surface. But unlike the squalid buildings of the Hive, every baatezu structure seems also to project its own importance.

Furthermore, the baatezu design their cities along the same lines, with grand structures of note toward the center and the squatting homes and businesses of the lesser fiends toward the fringes.

ART

Baatorian works of art are often stunningly well-composed and chilling in their cruel precision. The viewer often feels uneasy, as if fire ants were crawling across his flesh. Yet much baatezu art lacks a spark that most critics think should appear in the best pieces. Please don't misunderstand me; the baatezu definitely have aesthetic talent. But few flends of lower-ranking stations are allowed to create at all, and of those, even fewer dare to produce art that might rival the work of their superiors. And the greater baatezu don't seem to have the creative juice necessary to make masterpieces. Their music, for example, is stirring and manipulative (the baatezu know the secrets of the mind, after all, and they know what's effective), but it follows a pattern that, once discovered, reduces the pure enjoyment of the piece.

That's the problem with all Baatorian art, from music to murals to verse. Once you've discerned its pattern (which can be difficult or simple, depending on the creator), the rest holds no surprises. A fiend may begin a work in a flash of creativity, but everything else must follow logically from that point. That structure is the work's inspiration and its downfall.

The economy of the baatezu is almost too agonizingly complex to discuss here. Suffice it to say that their culture operates on the gem standard, supplemented by coins of various purity (and many dark jewels are the kind traded by shadow fiends — gems that house stolen mortal minds). But few baatezu view riches as the path to true power (though they certainly foster that school of thought on the Prime). Money's often used to lure mortals toward evil, but a gelugon with vaults of diamonds isn't necessarily any stronger or more respected than one without a copper piece to its name.

Most baatezu value larvae, magic, knowledge, or even the exchange of favors more than material wealth.

The more habitable layers of Baator hold shops and businesses that deal in various items, mostly for the benefit of travelers. The baatezu don't need to buy things; the lower ranks receive the essentials of existence from the higher, and the higher can simply take what they like whenever they wish.

EDUCATION

Education is a core part of baatezu life. While they believe firmly in the lessons of experience, they also know that certain types of knowledge just don't get passed on that way. Thus, they've founded schools for promising baatezu, abominable institutions full of the wis-

dom of the masters and the untapped potential of the students. It's no dark that the tanar'i (and no doubt others) would love to destroy these places.

Each school specializes in a certain path of courses that grooms a fiend for a particular place in Baatorian society; sub-schools provide more intensive education (in pain, manipulation, politics, subordination, and so forth). The schools are, naturally, dismal bastions of cruelty and humiliation, run by the various ministries of the Dark Eight. Rigorous and painful examinations weed out the fiends who don't excel at a particular line of study; if they fail in more

Selected* Laws of the Baatezu

- I. Strength lies only in unity.
- II. The strong rule the weak.
- III. All lies contain a spark of truth.
- IV. Slavery creates freedom.
- V. Failure leads to punishment.
- VI. Do to others as they have done to you.
 - a. When possible, do to others *before* they do to you.
 - b. Treat your inferiors as your superiors treat you.
 - c. Learn your lessons from above and below.
- VII. Haste makes waste.
 - a. Revenge is best tempered by time.
 - b. Plan carefully and leave no evidence.
 - c. There is no crime if there is no proof.
- VIII. A sharp eye and mind are more valuable than strength of arms.
 - a. Let cunning be your watchword.
 - b. Any fool can be won by extravagance.
- IX. Know your enemy.
- X. None may rise unless another falls.
 - a. There's only so much room at the top.
 - b. If you would ascend, you must first topple another.
- XI. Take pride in yourself and your works.
 - a. Admit weakness or error only when it gains you an advantage.

Uncounted volumes line the shelves of the Library of Infernal Law in Malbolge, and still more fill other cities of Baator. Further, it's thought that each caste and station has its own code of behavior; for example, the charge of "inherent chaos" weighs more heavily against a greater baatezu than against a lesser.



than two of the courses suggested by the Ministry of Promotion, why, it's off to the Blood War.

Some say that mortals can gain access to certain schools. I'm unable to verify the truth of that statement, but who knows what sort of deals the baatezu make? I know I'd gladly pay a small fortune for the privilege.

GOVERNMENT

As noted earlier, government on Baator consists mainly of the nobles of the lords and the ministries of the Dark Eight. These two groups seem to be growing together gradually, but right now they're fairly distinct. The Dark Eight (and their minions) prosecute the Blood War. The Lords of the Nine (and their servants) govern the layers of the plane and the fiends therein. It's a strange mixture, seeing as the Dark Eight control most aspects of baatezu life, but their laws recognize the need to accede to the desires of the lords and their feudal system. (Some say the Eight are really just an outgrowth of the lords, that the lords see their own importance waning and plan to evolve into a new form of government, but I don't place much faith in that rumor.)

The Dark Eight have established ministries across Baator, each answering to its respective member on the council. The ministries oversee the day-to-day life of the baatezu, including the education of the ranks, the use and abuse of other creatures across the planes, and the smooth running of government. They've even instituted emergency procedures for their continuance should the tanar'ri succeed in the unthinkable and destroy an entire ministry (which is highly unlikely, given that each organization has numerous outposts spread throughout Baator).

Each city on the plane has at least one branch of each of the ministries. Detractors call this paranoia on the part of the Dark Eight — that the pit fiends don't want their comrades to gain any knowledge they don't have. I say it's simply because the Eight wish to have their fingers in every part of baatezu life.

HISTORY

It's said the Dark Eight keep a brutally honest record of Baatorian history, an account free of the politics, revisionism, and outright falsehoods that mar the records that aren't so closely guarded. If such a document exists, I haven't read it (though I'd dearly love to). But the idea isn't so far-fetched. The Eight truly believe that the baatezu can and should learn from the mistakes of the past.

Of course, they also believe that other races (especially the tanar'ri) don't need to know what those mistakes are. Thus, any history a mortal researcher might find in the libraries of Baator is likely to contain at least 25% pure fabrication. Unfortunately, the lies hold together well enough that there's no way to tell which parts are true and which are "misdirection."

MILITARY

For the baatezu, the lowest ranks of the military hold no honor, just endless drilling, fighting, and death. But promotions come fast and furious for successful Blood Warriors, at least up to a certain level. There's always a need for just about any type of lesser baatezu, because the commanders often protect themselves with walls of lower-ranking fiends (and that's just more reason to perform well and receive a promotion into the higher stations). Though the front lines usually see the dregs of baatezu society, the finest are sometimes sent to fight as well; nothing brings out the best in a fiend like a trial by fire.

The Baatorian military is just as strict as the society; both are run on the same principles, after all. However, serving is not advantageous in and of itself; for example, a military cor-nugon enjoys no more respect or status than a "civilian" cor-nugon. Both have paid their dues in reaching their caste and station. On the other hand, a military baatezu that serves well might eventually move on into the armies of the nobles, and from there to a position of nobility itself. Generally, the most a civilian baatezu can hope for is to move into its chosen ministry; only by serving with extreme distinction does it gain a shot at nobility.

RELIGION

The baatezu don't really have a religion, as such. They serve the Lords of the Nine and occasionally various lower-planar powers, but they rarely offer up their lives in prayerful service to either. Their religion is law; their rituals, evil. That's all they strive for, and though they may manipulate mortals through religion, they keep their own number away from it.

Why? Even a child could guess. The Lords of the Nine, the Dark Eight, and other Baatorian superiors demand the respect of the race, and they don't want the baatezu to devote any part of themselves to other figures. Those fiends who choose to worship a deity do so only to gain the power that comes from such a deal. Even then, they cloak their religious allegiances as carefully as they can. I find this odd relationship fascinating. Why, I've penned an excellent (though strangely poorly received) treatise on the subject, should you find yourself in need of a clear and thoughtful analysis.

IN SUMMARY

Nomoto Sinh

Though they number far less than the tanar'ri, the baatezu have managed to keep a foul stranglehold on the Lower Planes and, indeed, on most of creation. It is my sincere hope that you now have a better understanding of why that is. Said fiends love their intrigues more than they love their lives, and that is no exaggeration; their schemes can live beyond them and shape the planes, for cons to come. Immortality in belief — that is, being immortal because of the belief of others — is a strong weapon indeed.

The baatezu need no other.

◆ THE CITY OF MAN ◆ (Town)

CHARACTER. Behind the obvious lies the hidden. The right twists and turns can bring true understanding and true vision. Even the flesh has its share of secrets.

RULER. The ruler of the City of Man is Alasta the Keen, a beautiful erinyes. She's only recently been promoted to rulership of this city and is still learning the ropes. Her gelugon mentor, Kk'laris, the last ruler of the city, promoted Alasta and stepped aside — a bit too eagerly, some say.

BEHIND THE THRONE. Kk'laris is the nominal shadow ruler of the city, "guiding" Alasta's every move. But anyone who knows the Rule of Threes is looking for yet another basher with his fingers in the government. That other basher is rumored to be the pit fiend Furcas, Minister of Mortal Relations. Furcas had the city built in the first place, and chant is he makes sure it's run right.

DESCRIPTION. This enormous burg (nearly 81 miles across) sits atop a gently-sloping hill in the layer of Minauros. The hill rises above the fetid muck and offers a breathtaking view of the surrounding swamplands. Intermittent lightning races across the sky behind the city, illuminating its spires and hurtling arches. Each time the sky flashes, a body sees another aspect of the city, which is laid out in nine rings and tempts many a traveler to enter.

"Course, first he's got to find his way in. Unless a body walks the secret path (wending around and through the city three times), the town appears to be an abandoned marble burg decorated with frescoes depicting scenes of unspeakable debaucheries and glories long past.

On the other hand, if a cutter does find the correct route into town, he hears the sounds of riotous revelry long before he spies any life. When he rounds the final corner of the path, he suddenly stumbles across a mob scene — he's entered the first ring of the City of Man.

The nine rings are actually a smaller set of larger divisions. See, the first three rings — Sensation, Desire, and Purity — are collectively called the Walls of the Body. The second three — Emotion, Logic, and Understanding — are the Paths of the Mind. The third — Body, Mind, and Power — are the Temptations of the Spirit.

Anyone who walks the rings in the proper sequence undergoes some changes. For instance, the Wall of Sensation purges all sensual pleasures from a traveler by offering them in such excess that he eventually wearies of them. This first ring is the only one in the City of Man that boasts such endless debauchery, and here a body can find anything he wants, from pleasure in silk to agony in chains to a combination of the two.

Eventually, the path leads out of the Wall of Sensation and into the Wall of Desire, a realm of desperate sods seeking pleasures of a new variety. They come together to find ultimate satisfaction,

but they won't have any luck until they reach the Wall of Purity. There, they learn to understand that the mind governs the body, that physical pleasures are nothing compared to the delights possible in the mind. This ring is a gray place of purification and asceticism.

And so it goes through the rest of the city. Visitors can travel back through any rings they've already mastered, but they're forbidden to continue inward until they understand the secrets of their current ring. Armed guards patrol the 10-foot-thick and 40-foot-high walls, making sure no visitors try to advance before they're ready.

Within each ring, the marble buildings serve as places to indulge in the ring's dominating feature, with plenty of room set aside for folks to sleep and replenish themselves as well. The only structure forbidden to casual visitors is Alasta's palace, and even that opens up to those few who master the Temptations of the Spirit.

What's the purpose of the city? Chant is it exists to lure mortals into the embrace of Baatorian ideals, that it was built by the Ministry of Mortal Relations to foster goodwill among mortals and slowly corrupt them. Another rumor says this is the place where all erinyes bring their prey, so the victims might eventually become baatezu. Regardless, a body can leave the city whenever he likes — the baatezu want their recruits to come to them freely.

MILITIA. A company of cornugons keeps the peace, while solitary hamatula roam the city looking for trouble. When they find a problem, they take care of it quickly and efficiently, with a minimum of fuss, so as not to disturb the workings of the rings. Nothing's more likely to break the mood of the visitors than violence from the militia.

SERVICES. The City of Man holds all the basic goods offered in any city across the planes, and here it's all free — but only for visitors who walk the rings. (Greedy planar traders caught trying to take advantage of the situation are publicly tortured to death.) Naturally, the baatezu aren't going to stock any items or provide any services that might be used against the city itself, but otherwise, they're happy to outfit their visitors with whatever they need to complete their journey toward total understanding.

LOCAL NEWS. Chant is that Alasta's not running the city quite right and will be ousted soon if she doesn't buck up. Also, a tanar'ric agent's supposedly crept into the city and is making his way through the rings; once he understands it all, he'll take the dark of the place back to the Abyss.

One persistent rumor that penetrates all rings says that the city's really a baatezu training camp, that mortals who reach the center are either cast onto the planes to encourage lawful evil or transformed into lemures. Either way, more than a few folks are giving up on their quest for understanding and leaving the city — and occasionally they're brought back, some say in chains (so much for freedom of choice).



THE CITY OF MAN

SCALE IN MILES

0 5 10

THE WALLS OF THE BODY

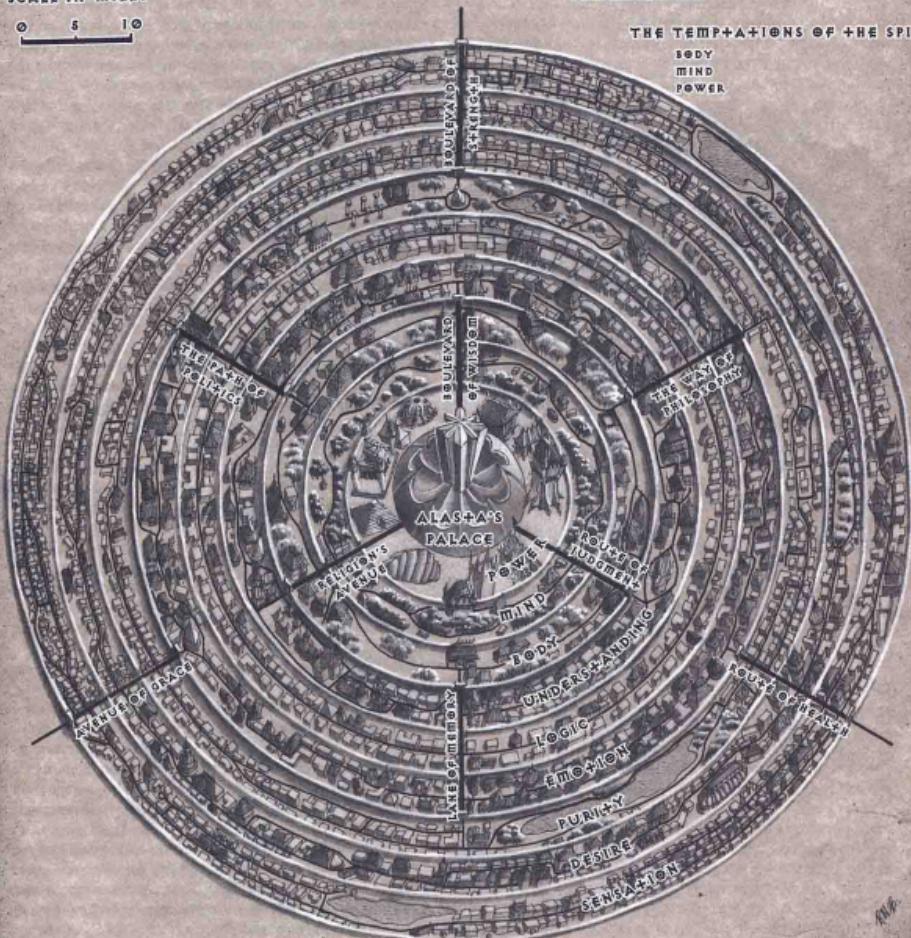
SENSATION
DESIRE
FURY

THE PATHS OF THE MIND

EMOTION
LOGIC
UNDERSTANDING

THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE SPIRIT

BODY
MIND
POWER



THE TANAR'RI

You want to understand the tanar'ri? Here's how.

Look into yourself. Find the core of hatred there.

Don't worry if you can't find it right away. Just keep searching. Eventually, you'll peel away the skin of what you thought was virtue and find a writhing pit of darkest sin. Even if you're one of the purest berks in existence, you'll still discover the part of you that's blacker than any ebony. The part that tastes of bitterness, despair, and envy. The part that tastes, most of all, of rage at all the things you can't change and all the things you might have.

Hold that malevolent core in the palm of your mind for a time. Picture it expanding, slowly growing to become the size of your entire heart. Feel it thumping in your chest, stronger and stronger, attuning every fiber of your being to its wicked rhythms of pain and horror. Can you imagine the groundswell of rage needed to make it grow this large, the anger that would drive you ever onward with a heart choked by unreleased fury? You can?

Good.

Continue.

You haven't

even understood what it is to be a manes yet.

Your heart of darkness

keeps growing. It extends its

veins like spitting serpents through your body, cancerous lesions of violence erupting across your skin. Your body blackens to match your heart, and your mind soon follows. Everything you see becomes tainted by your rage and bleak hatred. You can't imagine a time when you felt any of the emotions that creatures of good are said to possess. Love and friendship are foreign concepts; you know their meaning but not their truth. Instead, you use the words cruelly to create hope in others — but only so you can crush it later.

You become a creature without a conscience. Others exist only to serve as your tools, only to satiate your needs — even if those needs are merely for things that you can burn and sting and tear to mewling shreds. Creatures mightier than you are obstacles to be overcome. Creatures weaker than you are worms to be crushed or ignored or abused. The only time you might form an alliance is to join forces with another being in order to tear down an obstacle greater than either of you, though once that goal has been accomplished, you quickly turn on each other.

Life is cheap, in other words. You might as well make the most out of your existence, and to the Abyss with anyone else.

Got all that? That's only the barest glimmer of how the tanar'ri feel. Don't mess with them. Don't even argue with them — their rage can scald the skin from your face and boil the water from your eyes.

What's worse, they feel that the vagaries of the cosmos conspire to prove them right. Every single one of them feels the weight of the planes on its shoulders, and there's nothing that can convince the fiends that the multiverse is a kind place to be. If they were ever to change, it'd have to be a change from within. And that's where they're least likely to change, because they simply can't conceive of the notion that they might be wrong.

This chapter takes you into the tanar'ri body, the tanar'ri mind, and the tanar'ri heart. But be warned: While we've strived to bring you the truth, what you read here may or may not be wholly accurate. That's because what's true now may become false later, and what was false before may become true in time. With the tanar'ri, all things are possible.

— Jessyme Rauch, Tanar'ri Specialist Extraordinaire

Foolish consistency
is the hobgoblin
of little minds, or,
in this case, dead minds.

— KALE MEST,
ARMANIYE LEADER,
AFTER A RAID ON A
BAATEZU ENCAMPMENT



◆ IN + THE ABYSS ◆

Michil Kedell

Do you know, there's still debate as to whether the Abyss even exists on its own? I've engaged in a few myself! Argument rages over whether the creatures of the Abyss are formed by the energies of the plane or whether they create it through their desires and hidden fears, with each layer only as big as the dreams of the creatures that cross it. The Abyss is the place where every evil impulse is laid bare. If you can imagine something awful or grotesque, you'll find it there (though why you'd go looking, I couldn't guess). But does the imagined thing already exist, or does the imaginer (consciously or otherwise) impose his will on the plane, forging it to his whim? Then again, does it matter? After all, no matter the method of its creation, the thing is there.

The shifting lands of the Abyss are a welter of impressions, and all of them are bad. I quote from Jeena Ealy's excellent novel *Evil's Crown*: "It's like the stench of an open sewer combined with the sound of an old harlot's death on top of the taste of a scream." And believe you me, that's just for starters. The Abyss has creatures of such malevolence and power that they'd tear the pattern from your brain and crush your will just for crossing their path miles back. It's a place of evil in all its permutations, with the only law being that there is no law except for the law that's imposed. It's a warring riot of perceptions, with sight and sound and taste and touch and smell and all the other unknown senses set at each other's throats.

In the Abyss, the only pattern is chaos, the driving force hatred. It's a place of senseless turmoil and irrepressible horror. My goodness, how many ways can I say it? It's the Abyss, the home of the tanar'ri. Chant is they're the only creatures that could evolve quickly enough to survive on such a hostile plane. The fiends adapt to their plane, you see, but their plane also adapts to them, constantly adding new and more fearsome hazards that'd surely crush the life from even the most experienced and best-equipped planewalkers. The tanar'ri stand up to it.

Still want to learn about the tanar'ri, friend? It's hard not to be fascinated by them. Creatures of strength and cunning and treachery, they're totally unpredictable. They're children of chaos, same as the slaadi, but they've got an added dimension to their character – that of unmitigated evil. They're completely shaped by their own will, driven by bursts of creativity and manic insight, filled with impotent rage against a multiverse that cares nothing for them.

CREATION AND JUDGMENT

I thought it perhaps best to start with a quick lesson on the manner in which the tanar'ri come to exist. Now, I don't mean the origins of the race dating back to the beginning of time; I refer only to the means of creation of the lowest-ranking fiends.

When a mortal who devoted his life to chaos and evil dies, he becomes a petitioner, and his spirit wends its way to

the Outer Plane that most closely matches the essence of his former being: the Abyss. If, in life, the petitioner worshiped a particular Abyssal deity, he ends up in that power's realm and is transformed into a shape of the god's choosing (perhaps even his original form).

If, on the other hand, the mortal did not pledge his life to any one power, his spirit becomes a disgusting larva, which is still con-

sidered

a peti-

tioner.

The new

larva appears

in the Moun-

tain of Woe

(the 400th

layer of the

Abyss), where it

is judged by

pompous nalfesh-

nee according to

the following guidelines:

- ◆ Spirits with little promise become manes, fit only as food or supremely expendable soldiers. Like larvae, manes are still petitioners.
- ◆ Spirits that seem sufficiently evil and malleable become dretches – honest-to-goodness members of the fiendish race.
- ◆ Especially proud spirits that need to learn humility – and humiliation – become rutterkin, mightier than either manes or dretches but also more reviled.

Of course, the judges don't always follow these guidelines – they are tanar'ri, after all! And that raises another sticky issue: How do chaotic nalfeshnee accurately judge the hosts of larvae that swarm before them? Truth is, they probably don't. Oh, they claim to be able to spot the best and most promising larvae, the ones that'll surely make the finest tanar'ri, but that's doubtful. More than likely, their decisions are completely arbitrary. The fiends have established a method of selection that's really just a dark mockery of a lawful, ordered system.

The nalfeshnee transform just about all the larvae that appear before them. That's part of the reason the tanar'ri so staggeringly outnumber the baatezu, who apply much stricter standards when it comes to choosing larvae; fewer "acceptable" larvae means fewer baatezu. Of course, not all tanar'ri arise from petitioners, but the fiends have other advantages, too, when it comes to the numbers game. They blossom spontaneously in the chaotic maelstroms of the Abyss – much more frequently than the baatezu spring from the rigid ground of Baator. And many types of tanar'ri can breed to produce young naturally (as will be discussed later in this chapter).

YOU — MANES,
YOU — RUTTERKIN.
YOU — DREACH. YOU —
DINNER.
— MAGIS+RATE
@ OZEWART,
NALFESHNEE LORD,
JUDGING
PETITIONERS

CHAOS IS NOT STUPIDITY

Before we continue, I really should set something straight. I know what some of you must be thinking. "Tanar'ri? Feh! They're as jumbled as a windstorm of leaves. Me, I can think. I can plot. I can plan. I'll always be three steps ahead of those addle-coved fiends."

Oh, my. My, my. Best read on, all those who hope to take advantage of the chaos bred into the tanar'ri spirits, all those with lawful natures who hope to trick and dupe and make hordlings out of the Abyssal fiends.

It's said that one of the best ways to destroy a tanar'ri is through planning, that since the creatures are incapable of hatching complex schemes, they're easy victims of those who can. That's barry talk, plain and simple (and spread by the tanar'ri themselves, I wouldn't doubt). Heed my words: The tanar'ri can and do make plans. They're fully capable of weaving plots that span centuries of work – it's just that they don't work together, not unless it suits them. They don't build for future generations or the good of the race. They focus only on themselves and on increasing their own power.

Just ask any baatezu. If anyone knows just how dangerous complete self-interest can be, they do. They've opposed the chaotic tanar'ri for millennia now, and they've not made much progress against their hated enemies. They're stuck, and it's due, in part, to the very chaos they despise. See, the baatezu are too steeped in the ideals of law and order to understand just how a tanar'ri can exist – let alone prosper – when even *it* doesn't often know what *it* will do next. Oh, the lawful fiends have studied chaos theory, hired Xaositects, jumped through all sorts of hoops in the hope of better understanding their foes – and they're still no closer than they were before.

If the methodical, persistent baatezu can't find holes in the tanar'ri shell after eons of trying, is there really any hope that a lawful mortal could?

AN ENDLESS VARIETY

How many different kinds of tanar'ri exist? A dozen? Two? Perhaps we've only identified some twenty-odd types of Abyssal fiends, but I'd bet a week's wages there are more kinds of tanar'ri than there are portals in Sigil, trees on Arborea, gears on Mechanus – you get my meaning.

You see, there's only one rule to the shapes of the tanar'ri: Form is slave to function. Since the very birth of the multiverse itself, the fiends have adapted themselves to the rigors of the Abyss, and that has shaped every successive form they've ever taken. Oh, the race has a set of standard shapes, ones that appear often enough to make folks think the tanar'ri have an organized system. (Why, do you know that some primes still classify the multitudinous tanar'ri by type, creatively labelling them Type I fiends, Type II fiends, and so on? I can't decide which is greater: the irony of trying to pin one of the most haphazard races in the cosmos to the wall like dead butterflies, or the arrogance of the primes in thinking they could do it in the first place.) But

for every form we see, there must be fifty we don't. More, no doubt, for we believe now that each layer of the Abyss spawns particular shapes suited to living there.

With so many different kinds of tanar'ri, the pattern of evolution – the order in which *this* fiend becomes *that* fiend before turning into *that other* fiend – must be staggeringly confusing, no? Well, no. The forms of the tanar'ri aren't locked into a hierarchy. Certainly, they all begin from one of a few common points: drestches, manes, or rutterkin. After that, the only thing that governs their climb is their lust for power (a discussion for another time; see "Ascension," later in this chapter).



EVOLUTION OF FORM

In the ever-changing layers of the Abyss (which I contend are *not* infinite, just uncountably numerous), the tanar'ri must adapt or die. When fiendish life rises spontaneously on one of the layers, it's because the larvae there have managed to evolve to such an extent that they can survive. Of course, on some layers the process is more difficult; generations of larvae appear and die and appear and die, growing tougher all the while, until finally one of them rises up from the chaotic soup of its pain and assumes a form that can exploit the layer's harsh environment.

What I'm saying is that the shapes commonly taken by the tanar'ri are those most suited for the rigors of the Abyss, forms that can survive in more than one specialized setting. Tanar'ri that evolve into vrocks can function well in environments of land or air, while those that become washrithil get on best in liquid. The alkilith doesn't seem suited for *any* environment known to mortals, though it thrives in its own parts of the Abyss.

Is this an automatic change that's forced on the tanar'ri? I don't believe so. The newer fiends take their cues from the strength and staying power of the more experienced members of the race. They slowly shape themselves into the forms that have the best chance of survival in their home layers. Later on, they may take other forms, but only when they have the energy to spare. (Remember, though, the tanar'ri work on the Abyss just as it works on them. Their belief and power feeds the chaos of the plane, and it returns the favor by making them strong.)

In the Abyss, power equals station. That's an essential fact of life. The lowest creatures there, the larvae, learn that mighty quick, and they evolve toward sentience and strength just as fast as they can. Some of them make it; others wind up as food for the other tanar'ri. Force of will counts for a lot, but chance and luck are just as important – we're talking about the Abyss, after all.

◆ RANKINGS ◆

Xanxost

Hello, mortals! It is time for you to learn about the different kinds of tanar'ri to be afraid of. But do not worry! Xanxost has personally killed many of these fiends while researching this book. So just take Xanxost or another slaad with you when you fight tanar'ri and you will be fine.

One thing everyone thinks about the tanar'ri is that they obey a system of castes and stations. You know, like the baatezu or yugoloths. Xanxost likes its baatezu and yugoloths sprinkled with ground howler skull. But oho! The tanar'ri do not obey anything. It is just a story spread by leatherheads who can not help but find an order for everything in existence. It is a lie told by those who know nothing of chaos.

What Xanxost means to say: There is not a sodding way anybody can tell anything for sure about the tanar'ri. A berk will get dead-booked if he tries. The tanar'ri do not like mortals poking into their business. Or their bellies.

What Xanxost means to say: The Abyss has no common hierarchy. The tanar'ri have no easy classifications. Terms like "lesser" and "greater" are useless, or mostly so. But mortals like to use words to guess at the power of the more common shapes of tanar'ri and how that power affects their standing in the Abyss. Xanxost does not like standing in the Abyss!

But tanar'ri like it. So Xanxost will tell you now about how they stand there. Remember, things are not always what they look like in the Abyss. But here are the basic types of power for all the tanar'ri's physical forms. Yes, Xanxost has described every single kind.

No, wait. Xanxost has forgotten some. But these are the bulk of the known tanar'ri. Do you know any tanar'ri?

By the way, Xanxost has done its best to remove the taint of evil or good from these descriptions. The natural tendency when speaking of the fiends is to weight the words. In response to their evil, Xanxost has found itself balancing toward good. Soon all will be evened.

LEAST TANAR'RI

In the category of the *least* powerful tanar'ri, Xanxost knows two kinds: the manes, the dretch, and the rutterkin. Three kinds.

The lowly, bloated manes are the basic source of food in the Abyss. Xanxost especially likes the stomach-sting when they turn into acidic vapor as they are eaten. Delicious. Manes are the first to be herded into battle against the baatezu. Other tanar'ri do not consider the manes to be *real*

tanar'ri — they are just petitioners, spirits of mortal berks who spent their lives on chaos and evil. Every once in a while, a manes realizes that everyone else is much tougher than it is, and it fights to improve its position. This happens a hundred million times a day. No, wait — it is more rare than that. Only about one in a thousand of these special manes ever makes it to the next "rank" of power and becomes a dretch.

The slack-jawed dretches are not much better off than the manes. But other tanar'ri *do* consider them real members of the race. That is because fiends that reach dretch level stop being petitioners and become true planar beings. They get the spark of the planes. Now they are tanar'ri and there is no going back! The dretches are scared of the higher fiends and usually look to

please them. Thank you. If they remember nothing else of their former life, they recall that high-ups can help a fiend reach the next level of power. Oho! In the Abyss, this is a foolish notion. And the dretches are reminded of this harshly.

Still, now and again, a dretch takes command of its pack and rises above them, becoming a rutterkin. These malformed and crooked fiends are loners and exiles even among the tanar'ri. They are hateful. Vicious. Bad-tasting. Xanxost has heard that the original rutterkin were humans who came from the Prime to the Abyss, but Xanxost knows better to know that no one knows. Rutterkin are mostly incompetent, and all tanar'ri — even the dretches — despise them and say they are pitiful weaklings. And the rutterkin hate them back in return. Xanxost has even heard of rutterkin attacking other tanar'ri that are very puny or very wounded, but they would never go after anything that could hurt them too badly.

LESSER TANAR'RI

The tanar'ri called lesser come in all shapes and sizes and looks and smells and flavors. The weakest among them are the mortal-tanar'ri crossbreeds — that is what you get when a tanar'ri goes lustng for a new sensation or a mortal goes lustng for power. The weakest of these are the alu-fiends.

Alu-fiends, the female children of succubi and mortals, can only be born into their rank. They cannot ascend to it. Many humans and demihumans think they are attractive. Xanxost finds them ugly. They can occasionally pass among mortals unmarked, and they can heal themselves by harming their opponents. Like the rutterkin, alu-fiends are outcasts among the tanar'ri, and they work doubly hard to prove their hatred or to vent it. They are weak in combat but strong in spellcasting. This makes them valued by the high-ups.

The alu-fiends are the weird sisters of the cambions, the bastard children of – oh, oh! The tiefling Ice told Xanxost to stay away from such words. So he will just say that cambions are what happen when a tanar'ri mates with a mortal female. Any kind of tanar'ri. Any kind of mortal. And they can even make four different kinds of cambions. First there is a *major* cambion, whose father is a lesser or greater tanar'ri. Next there is a *baron* or *marquis* cambion, whose father is a true tanar'ri. Next there is –

Two kinds of cambions. Say, why does the baron cambion need a whole other name? Who does he think he is? Well, his father is a true tanar'ri, after all. So the baron is tougher and more likely to rise high in the Abyss. That is one thing the tanar'ri do right, just like the slaadi: The strong sweep over the weak, and accidents of birth often help determine strength. All cambions are valued as assassins and bodyguards, and most people will not cross a cambion more than once. Like the alu-fiends, cambions can only be born, not made.

Born or made are the armanites, the violent centaurs and hariaur of the Abyss. Half are born from armanite mating (they make such funny noises) and half are formed from weaker tanar'ri who manage to ascend to a better place. Limbo is a better place. The armanites are mercenaries and knights, and they travel in disorganized packs, hiring themselves out to whoever pays the most. Armanites like to go on missions that promise the most bloodshed at the least danger to themselves. Xanxost has heard stories that they devour the spirits of the fallen in the Blood War. Also that any bargain made with them is never worth the price. Do not trust them. But who trusts any tanar'ri?

Next in power comes the maurezhi. These fiends are ghoulish life-stealers, haunters of graveyards, and thieves of memories that are not their own. Did you like those words? Xanxost got them from an elf poet on the Outlands before his head came off his body.

The elf said that maurezhi are created by Abyssal lords. He said the fiends are made to lift secrets from the minds of the dead. If a maurezhi kills and eats a victim, it gets the死者's memories and experiences. Xanxost has seen hezrou generals beat and imprison their baatezu enemies and then stand aside and let a maurezhi go to work. This sometimes gets them secret plans for the Blood War. It usually gets them lots of stupid things the baatezu have in their heads.

Do the maurezhi get a choice? Does an Abyssal lord say to a tanar'ri: "Hey, how would you like to be a maurezhi?" Or does he say instead: "Hey, you will be a maurezhi!" Xanxost does not know. But at least the fiends can move on to a different form when they get tired of chewing up the creatures they kill.

Okay, Xanxost is back now. He left for awhile to find something to eat. Writing is such hungry work! Are you still there, mortals? It is time to keep talking about the tanar'ri.

Tougher than the maurezhi is the succulent succubus (and her cousin, the incubus). This fiend is definitely female. She can take the form of a female of any race and make herself so desirable that few mortals can resist her wiles. While what? An incubus does the same thing, only it can turn into

any kind of male. Both kinds of fiends try to tempt powerful mortals who are slaves to their appetites. Why do they do it? Oh! Three reasons. First, because they like the cruelty of luring the weak-willed and the foolish. Second, because their mission is to bring as many life forms as they can to the Abyss to serve as slaves and food. Third –

Two reasons. The yoichol, handmaids of the drow goddess Loth, are next. They look like big hands. No, wait. They can look like ladies or spiders or slime. They are thought to be lesser tanar'ri corrupted and twisted to serve the purpose of the dread Spider Queen. How do you corrupt a tanar'ri, that is what Xanxost would really like to know! Yoichol do not have much to do with the regular dealings of the race. And Loth squashes any molydeus, hezrou, or chasme that tries to punish one of her servants. For this, the yoichol are openly contemptuous of other tanar'ri. For this, the other tanar'ri tear the yoichol to pieces when they think they can get away with it.

Is that all of the tanar'ri? No, there is also the bar-Igura. Ask anything in the Abyss about the bar-Igura. If it does not kill you, it will say that the creatures are stupid, brutish, and nearly useless. The bar-Igura's primitive features and dull ways give no lie to that statement. There is little good about them, except that they are experts in guerilla warfare, and they make excellent scouts. Xanxost thinks that bar-Igura are smarter than other tanar'ri because they try to stay away from the Blood War. They also form their own tribal governments if they think no one is watching. But they are just as cruel and savage as the rest of the race; they just do not get out as much. Xanxost has had many run-ins with bar-Igura, both singly and in groups. They are cowards.

The buleazu are definitely bred for a role in the Blood War. But they are bull-headed in more ways than one. That is a slaadi joke – do you get that one, mortal? Buleazu are just like manes or dretches, only big and tough and dangerous. What Xanxost means is that the buleazu attack any enemy they see. If they do not see one, a commander had better make one up before too long. Otherwise, the buleazu will *find* a foe among their own ranks. They are more vicious than most tanar'ri, and they rend to pieces anything that makes them angry. Everything makes them angry.

GREATER TANAR'RI

The *greater* tanar'ri are the fiends who, through cunning, self-promotion, or lucky birth, have risen to a position of real power. They are worthy opponents for a slaad. They are tough bashers, and they do not fit into easy groupings.

The weakest of the greater tanar'ri is the nabassu. It is designed to spread the terror of the Abyss. Spread it like sause all over the multiverse. The Outer Planes are shaped by belief, especially the belief of mortals who live on the Prime Material Plane. So the tanar'ri think: Huh! If we scare these mortals, they will believe that we are very powerful, and so that will *make* us very powerful. The tanar'ri want their dark name feared across the multiverse. So the nabassu travel to the Prime and terrorize the beings there. Being there. Eventually, they return to the Abyss and get their reward: They are

locked up in one of the iron fortresses in the Plain of Infinite Portals. There they wait until they are needed again. A few of these nabassu are lucky and escape. Some of them take new forms. But the tanar'i say that a nabassu that flees its duty is more hated than a thousand rutterkin.

The flylike chasmes are stern agents of the true tanar'i. They usually leave Xanxost alone. They say their duty is to punish Abyssal warriors who desert the Blood War. How? Everyone pressed into wartime service is psychically imprinted with a symbol of chaos in evil (or is it evil in chaos?). The chasme home in on this symbol and brutally slay those who run away. But that does not always scare other warriors into staying — they abandon their posts anyway. The chasme drink the blood and fluids from their still-living victims in a most painful way.

Xanxost is thirsty now. Sometimes, a weaker tanar'i transforms itself into a chasme, but most of the buzzing fiends hatch from eggs. Any adult chasme can lay eggs all by itself, without mating.

So the chasme punish those who desert the armies. But the babaus are the ones who fill the armies in the first place. These leathery skeletons recruit for the true tanar'i. In exchange for their own freedom, they get other fiends to fight. If a babau can not find enough tanar'i to fill a high-up's army, it must take its own place in the ranks. Oho! Most babaus do their jobs very, very well.

True tanar'i watch the babaus carefully. Chant is that one of them will come to help a babau that is attacked. But not always. Just five times out of every one. No, wait: just one time out of every five. That scares anyone who thinks about attacking a babau. It also scares the babau — who wants to be watched by true tanar'i?

Next, next, next. The behemoth goristroi, standing over twenty feet tall, are often used as citadels to carry lesser tanar'i. A goristroi is as dumb as a barbazu, but it is so strong and hardy that even some slaadi fall back when a goristroi enters the fray. Goristroi eat any meat that comes their way, and it seems that their stomachs are never full. Even the high-ups among the tanar'i walk carefully around these monsters.

Most powerful of all greater tanar'i are the wastrilith. They serve almost no one. Though they make their home in the Gaping Maw, the watery layer ruled by the Abyssal lord Demorgoron, they are not the lord's servants. Wastrilith can swim in the River Styx without losing their memories. That's why they maintain the aquatic defenses of the Abyss. The fences of the Abyss. Do they do anything else? Who knows? They like to be alone in their water. A berk who swims in on a wastrilith had better be ready to die.

TRUE TANAR'I

No true tanar'i are ever born into their places. They all evolve from weaker fiends. Even the vrock, which hatches from an egg, is created whole within the egg. The egg can be sold or stopped from hatching, but the fiend within keeps all the memories of its previous forms. Any fiend that wants to be a true tanar'i has to get there on its own. Maybe that is

why the ones that make it are called *true tanar'i* — because they have understood what it is to hate and rage and never not know it.

The most important thing to know about the true tanar'i is . . . Xanxost forgets. But it is still very important to know that they take the Blood War very seriously! Their desire to see it through inspires the lower ranks. What Xanxost means to say: Their desire means that they bully the lower ranks into believing the same way. The true tanar'i see the advance of the baatezu as an encroachment on the pure chaos they love, or as the baatezu's attempt to dictate the Answer to them. (Each tanar'i thinks that it and it alone knows this Answer.)

The weakest of the true tanar'i is the vulturelike vrock. Vrocks are fighters, and they work together with other vrocks with uncommon grace and ability. That is a big thing for the tanar'i! Of course, vrocks are tough, but they are not as strong as some slaadi Xanxost knows — not even as strong as some humans Xanxost has eaten. Still, when working together, vrocks gain special powers that make them more dangerous. Here is the secret: Lure them off one by one. By one. Easy to do to a group of tanar'i.

The hezrou are the tanar'i that look the most like slaadi, though they are not as handsome or as strong as the greatest warriors of Limbo. After the babaus put armies together, the hezrou watch over the troops (or else the nalfeshnee will be mad). They take this task seriously and are instrumental in commanding the fiends that sweep across the Lower Planes. For tanar'i, they are remarkably docile in following orders. They are also remarkably cruel. Their hand claws make good weapons, and they know tricks to make a blow hurt more than it should.

The doggish glabreuz are the true tanar'i most often summoned to the Prime. When they get there, they do not just pull their summoner's head off. Not always. They like to tempt him with magic and power, planting seeds of greed in his mind. Planting seeds like viper trees. When the time is right, the glabreuz draws away much of the sod's strength, as well as the power of his very plane. Of course, in the Abyss, the glabreuz are fearsome overlords — they take revenge for having to follow the orders of mortals by crushing the spirits of those around them.

The slimy alkiliths are thought to be a creation of the slime lord Juiblex. Or maybe they are just the Faceless One's servants. Wherever they come from, alkiliths go on missions for all the Abyssal lords. Any berk who gets in their way can expect a painful and lingering death. They can corrupt mortals just with their touch or their terrible stench. Xanxost has never killed any alkiliths. The only other thing he knows is that they do not have to fight in the Blood War. And that they stand clear of the rest of the tanar'i hordes. Two other things.

The mariliths, six-armed wonders and mind-dancers to the highest degree, are like gems in the heart of the Abyss. Yes, they are evil, but they are deep thinkers and great tacticians. Slaadi and mariliths both prove that chaotic beings do not have to be *stupid* beings. Oho! The mariliths have mastered the inner rages of the tanar'i (or at least pushed those

feelings down). They can anticipate the patterns of law, even though they do not really understand them. The mariliths shape the strategy of the Blood War; they make the plans that confound the baatezu, the cursed lawful baatezu, the hated —

True tanar'ri. Next come the bloated nalfeshnee, the judges of the petitioners who come to the Abyss. Xanxost has seen them seated atop their flaming thrones on the Mountain of Woe, the 400th layer of the Abyss. They turn the petitioners into manes, drestches, or rutterkin, depending on if the tanar'ri need food or slaves or food for slaves. Nalfeshnee do not command the armies, but they decide who makes up the armies by promoting, demoting, or destroying fiends. It is said they hold the key to the Blood War in their fleshy paws. It is said that what is said is a myth spread by the nalfeshnee to boost their inflated sense of self-importance. It is said that what is said about what is said is sour grapes. Still, the nalfeshnee are truly the most powerful tanar'ri known.

The most powerful tanar'ri known? The balors. They are the kings of the race, the strongest in name and belief if nothing else. They are above the cold logic of the mariliths. They are passion and reason combined, a lightning dance of pure hatred and emotion unchained. Those words also came from that elf poet on the Outlands. He was such a funny mortal! Too bad for him, though.

Balors exist to inspire their kind and destroy all others,

and they do both very well. Someone once told Xanxost that there were only 24 balors in the Abyss. So he counted them. He found 178. Or was it 6,013? Or as many as the tunnels of Pandemonium? Maybe all three. But 24 balors? That is just a story to make people feel better, to make them not so scared in their beds at night. Only 24 balors would mean there were more Abyssal lords than balors. Is that idea less scary or more?

GUARDIAN TANAR'RI

Last, last, last. Last are the molydei, the two-headed enforcers of loyalty among the tanar'ri. They make sure the true tanar'ri remain faithful to the vision of the Blood War. The molydei report to the balors but will not hesitate to turn on them if their high-ups do not show the proper motivation. Of course, a balor will try to destroy any molydeus that dares to question its devotion. The ocean? Xanxost likes the oceans of Limbo.

Maybe the molydei are planted by some other force. Why would the balors say, "Here, molydei, hit us with your big axes if we do not keep in line"? Xanxost would not tell someone else to boss him around! But then again, the tanar'ri seem to like fighting each other as much as they like fighting the baatezu. The cursed lawful baatezu. The hated —



◆ ASCENSION ◆

Jessyme Rauch

First off, it's important to note that not all of the tanar'ri are obsessed with rising to the top. Some of them certainly do desire that level of power and infamy, but a large majority don't care to go through the whole fiendish rat race. Though they may have ambitions of their own, quite a few tanar'ri are content to wreak havoc on their own personal level.

For the baatezu to ascend, they must first pass muster at one or another of their infernal ministries. This requires getting the stamp of approval from one superior to the next, currying favor with all the important fiends in order to move up faster. For the yugoloths, it's a matter of finding the right way to believe and the best method to demonstrate pure evil. Both require the nod from high-ups, and that can take a very long time indeed.

The tanar'ri have no such rigmarole. There's no rhyme or reason to the way the chaotic fiends ascend. But the most common theory suggests that they rise as they will, or rather, as they *believe*. It'd be even better to say they *change* as they believe, because the Abyss has no real hierarchy to speak of, no castes or stations — just classifications of power that don't mean much. In the Abyss, a fiend earns status not by what it looks like but by what it does.

Of course, something that looks like a balor usually gets treated like a balor — that is, the other fiends steer clear. But occasionally lesser tanar'ri attack such a one to see if it's really as powerful as they've heard. That's why knights of the cross-trade looking to fool the tanar'ri don't usually do it by going in shapechanged.

To continue: In the Abyss, promotion is gradual and self-determined. If a tanar'ri believes it's tougher than anything else around it — and if it can prove that belief to its satisfaction and the satisfaction of its fellows — the fiend can slowly change its shape into something new and horrifying. The fiend doesn't *really* have to be as powerful as it pretends to be. If enough others believe, the lie eventually becomes true. Of course, it helps if the fiend has great cunning, deep self-confidence, magical weapons, abnormal strength, or the like to back up its claim to power.

An ascension can take anywhere from a century to uncounted eons, depending on the drive of the tanar'ri in question. Usually, a fiend rises only one level at a time. That is, it's nearly impossible for a least tanar'ri like a dretch to jump to the status of a greater tanar'ri in just one incarnation. The fiends generally accept these gradual increases in power; plodding through a succession of shapes lets them experience all the wonderful variations of tanar'ric existence. Only the most ambitious and devious manage to leap a greater gap, but it's been known to happen. After all, the tanar'ri don't follow any set promotion ladder.

Plenty of folks don't think that faith alone is enough to power the tanar'ri's transformations. They're certain that other forces — perhaps the balors or the nalfeshnee — channel and manipulate the belief. Others hold that the Abyss itself raises the tanar'ri to their positions without regard for

their ability or brainpower. And, of course, groups like the Fraternity of Order suspect that a secret order underlies everything; the pattern's not apparent, but they say it's there.

Which of the theories is true? It could be any one of them. Or perhaps none of them. Or perhaps *all* of them. In the Abyss, it's hard to be sure of anything.



◆ TRAITORS ◆

Telson Splithorn

The chaotic tanar'ri ever changing, ever mutable. The berks base their lives on being different from their fellows, on the triumph of individuality over all. Some of the fiends spend so much sodding time focused on the beauties and horrors of the self that they tumble to a novel way to be *truly* different — that is, they embrace the study of goodness with all their dark hearts.

Most of 'em revel in their new belief system for a time, flaunting their differences (if they can get away with it). But before long, they realize that the goodness they've toyed with ain't nothing compared to the exquisite horror of their old lives, and they return to the old ways with relish and a greater understanding than before.

A few fiends, though, turn stag and *mean* it. They stand fast with their new beliefs, learning to wash the evil right out of their body and soul. They're traitors to the Abyssal cause, seeking to be different and savoring it so much that they make a mockery of their entire existences.

What do the other tanar'ri do to 'em? Well, treachery's a watchword in the Abyss. The fiends there are used to betrayals, large and small. Sure, they avenge themselves when they can, but usually they just let the hatred fester. The tanar'ri have no time to plan the downfall of a traitor — not when their sights are far more focused on their true enemies, the baatezu.

'Course, it's different if a fiend turns stag *for* the baatezu. And yes, stories tell of tanar'ri that sell out their own kind to the lawful fiends of Baator. For example, the fall of the Abyssal fortress Malevolus showed a traitor's hand at work. Supposedly, only the champion hero Zaxarous could save the day. Still, no tanar'ri in the multiverse'd ever give itself fully to the baatezu, not even if it wanted to. The tanar'ri might be able to repress the evil in their natures, but they can't hold back the chaos. Not for long, anyway.

◆ BODILY FORM AND FUNCTIONS ◆

Michil Kedell

It's folly to assume that the tanar'ri have any mutually defining characteristics. My goodness, their very nature defies definition. What could be explained as logical or pat-

terned in the baatezu vanishes here, tossed to the wayside as the essence of chaos rears its ugly head. The organs of one Abyssal fiend are not the organs of another; the skin of one has no bearing on the skin of another.

No, friend, far easier than classifying the similarities and differences between the various types of tanar'ri is classifying the similarities and differences between the many layers of the Abyss. That is, after all, where the tanar'ri learn which forms to adopt (and which forms to flee from) in order to survive. To be sure, some layers are small (not at all the infinite expanses most folks seem to expect), and the tanar'ri that live there might all share the same forms, unable to leave or evolve. Some layers, certainly, support no life at all. They all have their own themes, and they're all inimical to life in their own way.

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

The tanar'ri forms have no pattern because the tanar'ri existence has no pattern. Some types of tanar'ri are wholly unique. For example, a humanoid fiend bound about with rings of cold fire and dripping with lightning is to be avoided at all costs. Though it's not a well-known creature, it is the dread Knight Errant, and to see it is to see death. It allows no one who looks on it to live, no matter how far it must hunt those who try to flee.

A perfect example. However, just because all tanar'ri can be different, that's not to say a clever blood can't understand a fiend's function by looking at it. You see, many of these physical clues are fairly obvious. Some are more subtle and remain hidden from the simple and the careless (of which I am neither). And some are nearly impossible to discern without the inside knowledge of an expert such as myself.

Here are some examples from among the obvious clues:

- ◆ Sharp claws, horns, and teeth indicate that the fiend comes from a layer that encourages close-up fighting, preferably the kind that results in massive bloodshed and pain (or, at least, that the fiend itself believes those qualities to be worthwhile pursuits).
- ◆ An ability to conjure fire from thin air probably means that the fiend is quite comfortable around flame (and thus unlikely to be bothered much by fiery attacks — be warned).
- ◆ A fiend's style of movement reveals a great deal about its character and environment. Does it slide sinuously across the ground? Does it shuffle with a jerky stumble? Does it cover huge distances with great horizontal leaps? Whatever the movement, it speaks volumes about the natives of a fiend's layer (both predators and prey), the dangers found there, and (perhaps) the best way for a traveler to make his own way across the layer, should he ever visit.
- ◆ A tanar'ri covered with spikes and another covered in slime are likely from layers far apart from each other. Furthermore, the substance of the spikes — bone? metal? — might indicate the most common material of that fiend's layer.

Do you begin to see how much the tanar'ri tell us without ever speaking a word? Let's continue with examples of more subtle physical clues:

- ◆ A fiend with sparkling eyes and a distant stare could be from a layer where it's necessary to peer into the infrared — or that the fiend's got the ability to see magic wherever it goes.
- ◆ Faceted eyes may give a fiend more than the ability to see in many directions; they might also allow sight into different realities or the ability to detect emanations of heat, cold, fury, peace — whatever.
- ◆ Snaky appendages — without bones or fingers — tell a canny blood that the fiend's a quick mover, that it can attack with blinding speed in its rage, that it can strike like a whip (and might also have venom).

Finally, then, I conclude with a few examples of physical clues that are nearly impossible for the average basher to detect or even understand:

- ◆ A fiend with a strange neck and oddly shaped ears might well be able to induce sound waves that can shake the earth and collapse structures (or even a foe's blood vessels, depending on the frequency and volume of the waves).
- ◆ If certain fiends stand at just the right angle in particular kinds of light, their bodies become translucent, and they appear to have vanished. Their home layers are no doubt menaced by fearsome predators with poor senses.
- ◆ A fiend with a slightly awkward gait may have just overslaked itself on a victim and be feeling a bit lethargic. That's the best time to attack or escape from the creature.

GENDER

It's not uncommon for the tanar'ri to take genders as they will. Some days they're male, some days female; some days they're neither, and some days they're both. They tend to stick with one or the other as they grow older, and to all those who think this implies order or stability, why, I argue that it's simply another example of the fiends letting the strongest urge dominate (as they do in all other aspects of their lives).

On the other hand, the fiends can't simply change their genders as easily as you or I might change our shoes. You see, it takes a considerable amount of effort, even for the mightiest members of the race. That's another reason why a particular fiend might make a choice and stick with it, letting the other possibilities fall by the wayside — it would much rather use its power for destruction than waste energy on switching genders.

PROCREATION

Most types of tanar'ri are formed when weaker fiends advance and take on new shapes. But the tanar'ri can and do breed among themselves. For example, armanites couple

after slaughtering baatezu, goristroi are carefully mated by their masters so as to produce young, and chasme lay eggs. Tanar'ri born "naturally" are, of course, true planar beings from their first moment of life (unlike those who begin their Abyssal careers as petitioners).

When two tanar'ri mate, the offspring is usually born into the same rank as the parents, or, if the parents are of different types, into a rank somewhere in between. In the latter case, the youngling often favors the mother's status, for she's the one who carries the child and influences it until the day it's born. Thankfully for the rest of the planes, many true-born tanar'ri are killed by their parents soon after birth, although some do survive to adulthood.

The various methods and periods of gestation are quite interesting to me. Some tanar'ric mothers carry a child for mere days before disgorging it onto the plains of the Abyss. Others carry their babies to term over decades, allowing the offspring time to grow and fester in their wombs like overripe fruit on a loathsome tree. As with so many other features of the Abyss, reproduction's a chaotic affair (and one that could spell no good end for the childbearee unless protected against the coming of the offspring).

Of course, try though we might, we can't overlook the fact that the tanar'ri love to mate with members of countless mortal races as well, using seduction, disguise, brute force (powers save us!), unholy pacts, or what have you. My goodness, I don't know of a single mortal race with which the Abyssal fiends can't crossbreed; their natures seem able to override the most compelling biological barriers. Mortal fathers are often slain soon after the coupling, and mortal mothers rarely survive the birth of their infernal children.

SUS+ENANCE

So what does a tanar'ri eat? Well, the answer's just what you'd expect (and fear), my friend: They consume meat — and lots of it. They prefer it still living, obviously, and even better, they prefer it scared. Every cutter's heard the story that certain animals can smell fear; with the tanar'ri, it's a known fact. If the fiends can literally frighten their prey witness, the flesh takes on a bold new flavor (or so I'm told!) that's far more satisfying than the meat of calmer victims. Oh, the tanar'ri can still derive nourishment from prey that isn't terrified, but it's just not as good for them.

But is there something deeper to the process? Well, while the yugoloths like the taste of meat flavored by fear and pain, it's thought that the tanar'ri eat the fear and pain *itself*. You see, they relish tearing the meat from the bones of the living because their victims' screams add to the fear felt by *other* prey (not to mention the dark tales that arise surrounding tanar'ri eating habits).

Some tanar'ri are said to eat the spirits of their fallen foes along with the corpses; others supposedly draw the magical essence from the bodies. But I can't tell you which kinds of fiends inflict what types of horrors on which sorts of prey. None of them follow any set pattern in their dining habits; it's senseless to try to force the tanar'ri into neat

rows of classification. There's even argument as to whether the tanar'ri need to eat or simply choose to do so, either for simple pleasure or for other purposes. For example, maurezhi eat their foes in order to assume their forms, and vrocks devour fallen opponents mostly as a symbolic gesture of superiority (though it also prevents certain fiendish enemies from returning to life).

If there's structure or symbolism to the way the tanar'ri eat (as there is for the baatezu and yugoloths), no one knows the dark of it. Unless they intend to instill fear and the reminder of painful mortality in their victims, it could be said that the tanar'ri eat just as they live: senselessly and destructively.

RES+ AND RESPI+TE

If the tanar'ri sleep, they manage to avoid showing it, or else they do it so quickly that it's nearly impossible to notice. They're creatures of constant motion, moving with purposeless aim from one task to the next. They don't ever seem to stop.

Oh, it's not impossible to catch a tanar'ri *dozing*, but in all my years of observing them, not once have I ever seen one actually sleep. Perhaps they were aware of my gaze. Perhaps they simply earn the rest they need in between the blinks of an eye, dreaming with every third step they take. Indeed, that may well be why they act as they do — they live in the twin worlds of sleep and wakefulness, never sure which is the dream and which the reality, and they're determined to wreak as much havoc in either.

This theory also explains the tanar'ri's bewildering reactions to so much of the multiverse and their ability to make completely dazzling leaps in insight. If true, it's both their blessing and their curse. (Of course, the fiends' strange behavior could just as easily be ascribed to insanity brought on by insomnia.)

◆ POWERS ◆ Jessyme Rauch

Truth be told, there's not really any such thing as a "standard ability" of the tanar'ri. Their makeup all but precludes such a statement. However, two special powers crop up repeatedly among the chaotic fiends: the ability to see in the dark and the ability to create darkness itself. And that's all we can predict with any measure of certainty. The list of standard powers isn't nearly as long as it is for the baatezu. But then again, the individual breeds of tanar'ri have also shown themselves to possess more unique abilities than the baatezu could ever know.

The tanar'ri also have the formidable power to transport themselves unerringly throughout the Abyss — and across the rest of the planes as well, though with slightly less accuracy — at the speed of thought. At least, they *used* to have this power. Centuries' worth of reports and accounts describe in meticulous detail the frustration of fighting off fiends that could move from spot to spot in the blink of an

eye. But not one tanar'ri has called upon its teleportation power in some time, not even when its life was at stake.

Now, the tanar'ri aren't likely to voluntarily forgo the use of the ability – especially not when it could save their lives – so one can only assume that they've somehow lost the skill. Exactly how it happened is a matter of debate, but it's best not to ask. The fiends are remarkably touchy on this subject, and some poor souls bear the scars to prove it.

◆ VULNERABILITIES ◆

Xanxost

Hello, mortals! It is time now to learn how to kill the tanar'ri. Xanxost knows of only three attacks that are fully effective: the *magic missile* spell and weapons forged of cold-wrought iron. Two attacks. A cutter who plans on dealing with the Abyssal fiends had better have plenty of these spells and weapons at hand. Any berk who does not is asking for trouble. 'Course, any berk who deals with the tanar'ri at all is asking for trouble, too. And the fiends like to answer such questions.

Now, cold-wrought iron does not just mean an iron weapon that is cool to the touch. Oho! Many sods learn the truth the hard way – the dead way. A cold-wrought iron weapon is one that has gone through a special forging process (available at most blacksmiths, especially in Sigil). It hurts the tanar'ri nicely. It also does the same to a number of other creatures; many things do not like the sting of cold-wrought iron.

Why do not planewalkers carry such weapons at all times? No one knows. Wait, Xanxost knows. There are two reasons. First, many planars think that cold-wrought iron weapons are primitive. Second, the weapons do not work so well against enemies with no special weakness for them – a good steel blade does better. Third, the tanar'ri tell everyone about the first two reasons, to try to get people to stop using cold-wrought iron. That way, the tanar'ri will have one less thing to worry about.

Other types of assaults hurt the tanar'ri as well:

- ◆ Magical acid burns them all, except for the alkolith – it does not care.
- ◆ Normal acid does the trick, but only sometimes. Some tanar'ri shrug it off after a wince or two, and others take no damage at all.
- ◆ Holy water and holy weapons work nicely – steal these things from the mortals known as paladins. They work even better if they are enchanted or made of cold-wrought iron – except for the holy

water, which usually must be made of water.

- ◆ Cold, gas, and magical fire hurt the tanar'ri, but not as much as they hurt Xanxost or other creatures.
- ◆ Electricity, poison, and nonmagical fire do not hurt the tanar'ri at all. Not even poison that has been set on fire. Xanxost has tried.
- ◆ Magical weapons work most of the time. 'Course, some are better than others. What scares a dretch might just tickle a balor – or make it mad enough to eat your heart.

Remember, though: No two tanar'ri are exactly the same. A fool who expects the same thing to work on all of them is a fool. Sometimes, what kills one fiend might not even wound another of the same type. But do not worry! Some tanar'ri take a liking to a mortal who tries to kill them and falls. They find it humorous that an insignificant worm imagines he has power over a fiend. They laugh even as they turn him inside out.

If you will be fighting tanar'ri, here is Xanxost's best advice: Run away instead, or bring along slaadi to help. If you still must fight, make sure you have a small arsenal, and remember the four main vulnerabilities of the tanar'ri: *Magic missiles* and cold-wrought iron. Two main vulnerabilities. All else is chancy.

MAKING DEAD STAY DEAD

Hello, mortals! It is time now to learn how to kill the tanar'ri. Xanxost knows of only three attacks that are fully effective: the *magic missile* spell and –

That has been said. It is time now to learn when a dead tanar'ri will stay that way and when it will not. Yes, the tanar'ri are immune to most magic. Yes, they resist magic that can harm them. Yes, they have the tough-as-slaadi attitude that lets them keep coming even when they are hurt badly. But the fiends can be killed. Xanxost has done it many

times. Sometimes, though, a fiend reforms back in the Abyss. It all depends on where it dies, what kind of tanar'ri it is, and how many claws it has on its left foot. Actually, it does not matter at all about the foot.

If a tanar'ri dies while it is in the Abyss, the berk is dead forever, no three ways about it. The corpse is sucked back into the heart of the plane and eventually spit out again in the form of a manes or some such lesser creature. It is too close to the source of its power, too close to reform and try again. The pull of the Abyss is just too strong. (If the fiend's spirit is somehow destroyed as well, the corpse just withers away and does not feed the Abyss.)



The tanar'ri find it easier to remake themselves when they are killed while away from their home plane. Their spirits simply fly back to the Abyss and are reborn. But not all fiends can do this. Least, lesser, and even greater tanar'ri have not developed enough of a link to the Abyss to find their way back there. Not way back there. Besides, they do not have enough willpower to reform even if they *did* make it. If they die out of the Abyss, they are written into the dead-book and that is it. Goodbye.

Only the true tanar'ri have the link and the force of will. Over the centuries, they have learned to master their forms and the fires that burn within. Something like a sword in the chest just will not do them in. The most learned of slaadi say the true tanar'ri carry pieces of the Abyss in their hearts when they travel, and the plane calls the fragments back when the shell falters.

Still, the process of rebirth takes time — four minutes, at least. No, wait.

It takes a hundred years or so. The white-hot anger of the dead tanar'ri must reshape its individual form out of the churning mass of hatred

that is the Abyss. But oho! The deader must hold onto its desire for life during this whole time. If it falters, the fiend is lost forever. But most tanar'ri struggle to the very last. It is part of their charm. And depending on a fiend's strength of will, it can be reborn into a higher or lower position on the power chain.

In any case, the baatezu, the cursed lawful baatezu, the hated —

The fiends of Baator are said to have perfected a device that traps the spirit of any fiend that opposes them. Xanxost will reserve judgment until it sees this device operate with its own eyes.

Some other slaadi have told Xanxost it is bafmy. "Xanxost," they say, "like we have told you, you are barmy!" They think that any tanar'ri that dies just reforms in the Abyss as the lowest of the low, returning to life as a manes. That this always happens, to all fiends. It would

A new glabrezu pulls itself from the chaos of the Abyss.

explain why the Abyss is so full of tanar'ri. But it is probably not true. Other fiends can die when they die. Even slaadi die when they die. So who says tanar'ri should come back to life? Not Xanxost! The tanar'ri are contrary, but not even they can give death the laugh forever.

◆ DEALING WITH MORTALS ◆

Telson Splithorn

Here's a tip for any mortal, prime or planar, thinking of peeling, summoning, or otherwise dealing with the tanar'ri: Stretch out in front of a thundering herd of maelephants or baku instead. You'll get the same basic result and save yourself a lot of time and hassle.

Truth is, that's good advice when it comes to any fiends, but it's especially useful for tanar'ri. See, because they're monsters of chaos, they tell the rules of engagement, negotiation, and diplomacy to pike it. Insult a baatezu or jostle a yugoloth, and a body can probably guess what'll happen next. It won't be *good*, but at least it'll be expedited.

But there's no telling what'll happen when dealing with a tanar'ri, and there's no use guessing what sort of mood it might be in. Sometimes a tanar'ri's generous and benevolent. Other times it maims the nearest sod without a second thought. And it ain't bound by laws, contracts, or loopholes. There's nothing to stop it from lying or peeling its way out of any deal it wants. The only rule it respects is the rule of force — and half the time it ignores that one, too.

In short, the tanar'ri are chaos personified, but their tastes run more to evil than any other creature I've yet encountered. They delight in showing cruelty to the weak and helpless, and they take a perverse pleasure in the torture of the body and the brain-box alike. Passionate and burning, all of their energy's geared toward satisfying their most hateful and selfish urges. And they jump at the chance for brutality, whether it's plucking the wings from flies or dunking a berk in a pool of caustic spittle.

Believe me, I ain't just rattling my bone-box; I know. I won't tell you how I learned to bind the life force of a marilith to my own, but I did it just the same. See, I wanted immortality and riches beyond my wildest dreams. 'Course, I knew the fiend's word wasn't worth a speck of dirt, but I also knew she couldn't refuse; after all, I held her life in my hands, right? Wrong. She took some of *mine* in return, and I've learned since that the immortality I was promised is eternal life as a dretch in her service.

Sound like something a tanar'ri'd do? No, I didn't think so, either. See, I was ready for her to boldly break her word and try to squash me. I wasn't ready to be peeled. But it just goes to prove my point: Every tanar'ri is an exception to the rule.

Still, with the mess I found myself in, I figured I'd best tumble to all I could about the tanar'ri. That's why I'm gathering chant for this book. I want to be prepared for the day when I'm finally scragged and dragged off to the Abyss.

Sure, I might forget most of what I learn, but I should be able to turn some of it to my advantage.

I hope.

SUMMONING + THE TANAR'RI

Like the baatezu, the tanar'ri desire strength on the Prime Material Plane. Again, like the baatezu, some're willing to cut deals with the Clueless to advance their own aims on the Prime. Unlike the baatezu, though, the tanar'ri want to establish personal footholds, looking to push their own causes rather than jump through their high-ups' hoops. They do it for themselves. They do it for sheer hateful pleasure. They do it to destroy and to build. They do it 'cause they *can*.

See, the tanar'ri ain't as vengeful as the baatezu, nor as coldly malicious as the yugoloths, but they're six times as dangerous. Like I said above, they don't honor the treaties established to bind fiends; all they recognize is the raw power of the spellslinger and the strength of the wards that prevent 'em from leaving the summoning circle. If a berk flubs the inscriptions for the barrier, any tanar'ri called won't hesitate to leave the circle and wreak devastation across the plane.

The glabrezu is the most commonly summoned true tanar'ri. It's clever, tough, cruel, and willing — the perfect candidate. 'Course, it takes a true name to get a glabrezu. Without a name, a body'll usually end up with a bulezau or an armanite instead. They hate being bound to the will of a mortal, but they're intrigued by new experiences. For most of 'em, ravaging the Prime is an entirely new activity. If they give the slip to their summoners, the fiends often set themselves up as gods or other bloods to be feared. Oh, once in a while a tanar'ri's canny enough to hide itself away, but most can't resist running free in a brand new world. Sometimes they enjoy it so much that a celestial has to pop in to put things right.

A favorite trick of true tanar'ri is to take control of the body of a prime, through the use of a special power much like the *magic jar* spell. Then the fiends simply run riot in their hosts. Chant is that the mortal form experiences much more sensation than the tanar'ric, so the fiends gorge themselves on the feelings in their borrowed blood. They don't give a fig about the bodies they infest, either. And when they've had their fun (or when they're cast out, if the host gets lucky), they leave their victims with the feeling of having been violated in the most profound manner possible.

ARCANE SOURCES

Plenty of black-spined books and flesh-coated tomes describe how to summon tanar'ri, but maybe one in a thousand spills the true dark of binding these creatures of chaos. Why? Well, part of it's that many of the books were written by the tanar'ri themselves. They want to dupe mortals into bringing 'em to the Prime, but they don't want to be chained up once they get there.

Sure, the fiends could journey to the Prime through portals, but that method's too unreliable, not to mention too



public — they might be followed through by a baatezu, a celestial, or any berk with an axe to grind. And if a tanar'ri pops over to the Prime on its own power (as with a hezrou's *plane shift* ability) in order to strike an infernal bargain with someone, well, the fiend's first got to track down a mortal greedy enough to do it. If a tanar'ri is summoned, though, it's got free rein to do as it likes — it won't be chased by planar enemies, and it always appears right in front of a perfect victim.

Of all the books on summoning tanar'ri, one of the most trusted sources known to mortals is the Harmonium- and Guver-banned volume *Mors Mysterium Nominum* (also known as *The Death of the Mysterious Names*). This ancient tome is half the height of a full-grown bariaur, wrapped in leather, and musty with the stench of the ages. It's said to hold the names of all the true tanar'ri in existence, along with the rituals needed to call and chain 'em. What's more, the book supposedly updates itself whenever a true tanar'ri is formed or destroyed anywhere in the multiverse.

Chant is that the back sections of *Mors Mysterium Nominum* even contain the secret names of the Abyssal lords, gleaned from the ancient days when the tyrants first rose from the ranks of the tanar'ri. These sections are hidden from normal sight. Only a blood with the right knowledge and the right key can see 'em, much less read 'em.

Most of the other books that teach a body how to summon and bind tanar'ri either draw from the *Nominum* or are simply frauds.

SPREADING + THE WORD

It's no dark that the Abyssal lords actively seek out congregations on the Prime. After all, the lords can move on to become true deities by gathering the worship of primes, and that's too sweet an opportunity to miss (even if it's a sodding difficult task).

Some of the Abyssal lords even go so far as to distribute spells that summon 'em to

the Prime, hoping that a foolish mage might actually dare to try it. There's a good chance the leatherhead'll be turned inside out for his trouble; there's an equally good chance he'll be rewarded with magic or service. The Abyssal lords want to keep folks guessing. If mere mortals can predict their reactions, how much easier would it be for the baatezu to do so?

Balors eager to begin their rise to lordhood occasionally make their names known as well. They want to be summoned to the Prime so they can work on developing a base of worship. Ironically, they often struggle to keep their bargains as best they can — at least at first. See, they figure that by striking deals with mortals, their fame will spread, and thus their might will grow. So in order to establish decent reputations, they've got to keep the agreements somewhat fair. 'Course, once a balor gains enough power and no longer needs to keep its word — well, look out.

Another warning: Any spellslinger who stumbles across one of these balor names'd better double-check his sources. Some balors find that their true names get spread around by their enemies so that they're called away from the Abyss at the most inconvenient times. Obviously, a berk who summons one of *these* furious fiends' best hope his wards are strong and perfectly drawn. Otherwise, he may well find himself embrased in flames and whisked away to suffer unendurable torments for his presumption.

There's no telling what a tanar'ri'll do to a summoner on any given day, nor how it might react from moment to moment. A barmy who insists on calling the tanar'ri from the Abyss takes his life into his hands every time he plucks a fiend out of the gibbering darkness.

◆ COMMUNICATION ◆ *Jessyme Rauch*

Most kinds of tanar'ri can communicate telepathically, except, perhaps, the manes, which are too witless to communicate at all. The fiends are far too diverse a crowd to have drawn together in a unifying racial language, so they've learned to project their thoughts across the distances between minds. Those that haven't picked up the skill of "mindspeak" must present themselves to their superiors on demand so the high-ups can simply pluck whatever information's needed right from their heads.

Based on reports from Blood War mercenaries, it can be determined that the tanar'ri are able to communicate via mindspeak to a range of about 1,000 yards — even across crowded battlefields. A forceful mental shout deafens the receiver's mind for a moment or two, much as an audible scream leaves a ringing in a body's ears. However, the mindspeak doesn't disrupt spellcasting or harm the target. It simply informs the poor sod that a tanar'ri wants to talk to him.

Interestingly, the fiends can use mindspeak to communicate with any intelligent race, for the messages rely more on symbols and concepts than on words. The lower tanar'ri, unable to express complex ideas, usually project symbols that are harsh and crude. Cannier fiends eventually learn to

translate these symbols into intelligible concepts that nontanar'ri can more easily understand. But be warned: Sometimes these fiendish symbols burn themselves into the receiver's mind, leaving him permanently scarred. The tanar'ri, naturally, take great delight in this.

Of course, just because the tanar'ri speak with their minds doesn't mean that they can't also do so verbally. The fiends scream and shout and threaten aloud as well as in silence. They just choose whatever method is most convenient or effective, or, truly, whichever they feel like using at the time. Some tanar'ri — usually those who deal regularly with mortals, like the alu-fiends, cambions, and succubi — have mastered one or more mortal tongues, but the bulk of the tanar'ri simply make noise.

The lower tanar'ric vocal speech resembles the barking of canines yapping incessantly as they vie for attention. More refined fiends speak in the soft drone of ocean waves coupled with the violence of a disturbed wasps' nest. But occasionally a balor yelps in jangled dissonance and a bargura murmurs in a smooth susurru. As with everything else about the tanar'ri, their use of speech can't be predicted. One thing's true across the board, though: Their vocal patterns aren't as direct as telepathy and tend to reveal the point of origin of the speaker. Among the fiercely territorial fiends, that can be a death sentence.

To tell the truth, the tanar'ri are a deconstructionist's dream. They don't ever fully understand the speech of another fiend, and it goes without saying that they're not fully understood either. When mortal scholars try to learn the tanar'ri language, they usually focus on the dialects of one or two of the chaotic fiends, but even then, it's a frustrating task. That may well be part of the reason the tanar'ri are so angry all the time — they're constantly and fundamentally misunderstood. That may also explain why the tanar'ri often resort to methods of communication that can't be misconstrued — like torture.

◆ A CULTURE OF CHAOS ◆ *Michil Kedell*

If you seek to understand the culture of the tanar'ri, my friend, just remember the nature of the Abyss: It's chaos. More to the point: It's *Chaos*. My goodness, anything can — and usually does — happen there. The tanar'ri watch their backs in all directions, constantly alert to any possibility, expecting the worst because they know that's what usually comes to pass. They lay plans and discard them just as quickly. In short, the fiends adapt themselves to any situation, no matter how sticky — that's how they're bred.

Their culture (if one can truly speak of a tanar'ri culture) reflects this. It surges in all directions, anticipating nothing and ready for everything, destroying itself from within when there's no threat from without. The Blood War? I see it as a diversion for the tanar'ri, a way to focus their anger beyond their own kind (a difficult task) and onto those who represent the law and order they so hate.

This is the key to understanding the tanar'ri: Each fiend believes that it — and it alone — knows the true answer to existence, the real meaning of life. And it tries to teach by example. I've heard this from enough different tanar'ri to assume that it's true. If it's not (which is unlikely), that would mean the fiends are all identically confused or have rallied 'round a common lie, and the fiends are too wildly individual for *that*. Thus, I believe it's this certainty of truth that drives the tanar'ri to their nefarious deeds. Granted, some of the lesser fiends simply exist to torture, maim, and kill, but those with any intelligence seek the answers for themselves and then try to impress that knowledge upon others. They're not looking to enlighten, but only to spread the doctrine of chaos — and the only way they know how to do that is through their personal torment and experience.

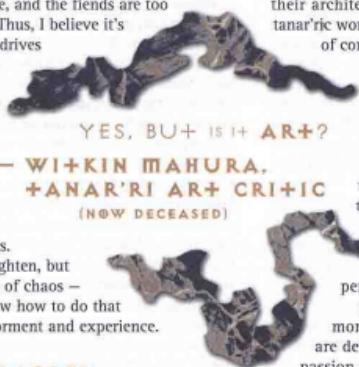
CHARACTER

Just how bad *are* the tanar'ri, anyway? Take the worst mortal murderer, the most amoral human monster imaginable. Now imagine all the horrors he's committed on his victims (steel yourself!) — wearing their skins, devouring their bodies, and other unspeakable acts — and multiply that by a hundred, a thousand. That mindless callousness and disregard for others, coupled with savage delight in pain and suffering, merely scratches the surface (*the surface!*) of the tanar'ric mindset. At least mortals who commit reprehensible actions usually feel some twinge of guilt; the tanar'ri revel in the misery they inflict.

Some "experts" claim that the tanar'ri act as they do because the fiends need to express their inner rage at being trapped in such hideous forms. Leatherheads who make this argument don't seem to understand that most tanar'ri *like* their shapes — they're adaptable and powerful.

One of the best explanations I've ever heard of the tanar'ric character is this: The fiends lash out because they're weary of being repressed by *tougher* fiends. Oh, I don't doubt that some accept or enjoy harsh oppression from the mighty. And I don't mean to imply that the tanar'ri at the top of the chain are *nice*; they're still nasty just for the sake of nastiness. But why do you think the Abyssal lords scratched their way to the top in the first place? So they wouldn't have to take orders from *anyone*, that's why! In fact, that's one of the few redeeming features of the Abyss: The fiends there are all individuals, and they fight with such ferocity because they're upholding their personal visions. (The worth of those visions is another matter entirely.)

They can be admired for that much. Powers know there's precious little *else* to admire.



YES, BUT IS IT ART?
— WIKKIN MAHURA,
+ TANAR'RI ART CRITIC
(NOW DECEASED)



AESTHETICS

This is another of the few points where the tanar'ri shine. As a race, the chaotic fiends produce art that is not pleasing, not pretty (powers be, sometimes it's not even art!), but it's always disturbing, always thought-provoking. Their paintings, their architecture, their music, their poems and stories — tanar'ric work is a hodge-podge (some might say mishmash) of conflicting images and themes, each of which portrays some new atrocity even more twisted than the one before.

Well, now that I've gotten the generalizations out of the way, I can focus in on a few exceptions. Yes, my friends, occasionally a denizen of the Abyss produces a work of undeniable appeal (I dare not say beauty) that touches hearts across the planes. For example, the cambion Ollistaa's epic poem *Into the Dread Styx* is a moving testament to loyalty, betrayal, and loss. Another personal favorite of mine is the series of cameos painted by the nalfeshnee Judge Qixxit of the mortal petitioners brought before her. The images are delicate and loving, showing a measure of compassion unthinkable in the tanar'ri. (The medium used — which is best unrevealed here — leaves something to be desired, but with the tanar'ri, we must take what we can get.)

In short, the tanar'ri aesthetic mirrors their lives — as all good art should. It is unpredictable and jagged and harsh and soft and flowing and clean and messy, all at the same time. It's a mixture of jarring contrasts where the audience expects smooth transition, and, well, a mixture of jarring contrasts where the audience expects jarring contrasts. I can no more explain the tanar'ri aesthetic than I can explain the dreams of the wind. The fiends are beyond definition.

But they produce very, very interesting art.

SOCIETY

Society? Balderdash! The Abyss has no society, and neither do the tanar'ri — at least, none that spans the whole plane. There is nothing more than what an ambitious fiend can carve out for itself and hold onto for a time. And even that can endure only if the next fiend to come along — the successor to the visionary — has the ability to hold it together, to twist it for selfish ends. It's not because anything made in the Abyss is *meant* to endure; quite the opposite.

Certainly, small kingdoms do exist throughout the plane, and some fiefdoms blanket entire layers. But whereas the baatezu rally around a single unifying principle, the tanar'ric instinct encourages divisiveness and chaos by its very nature, and the imposition of a single society goes against every drop of blood the tanar'ri possess. Of course, if a powerful Abyssal lord were to unite the layers and impose his will over the entire plane, the tanar'ri (theoretically, at least) would be under a single ruler.

At the time of this writing, for example, the lord Graz'zt has already taken over three adjacent layers (the 45th through the 47th, I believe). However, I don't think he'll claim too many more. That kind of domination would surely cause the lesser tanar'ri to rise up and cast out the one who would crush their freedoms; the fiends are capable of concerted action, after all.

LAWs

Are there laws in the Abyss? You might as well ask if there's chaos on Baator, or order in Limbo, or evil on Elysium! Now, I'm sure that many of our friends in the Fraternity of Order will find structure in the Abyss (even if they must impose it themselves), but let me tell you, friends, the only kind of law among the tanar'ri is the tanar'ri. By that I mean that each fiend is a law unto itself, each seeking its own way and its own truth or deceit (as the case may be). They each rebel against the higher powers and kick and kill until they can claim total freedom for themselves. They each act as their own judge, jury, and executioner, and pity the berk who breaks their "laws."

So how are these so-called laws established? No one knows (probably not even the tanar'ri). You see, they invent their lives over and over again with every breath they draw. They don't believe in consistency — why, that would nail them down, force them to be something they're not! The tanar'ri believe in making their own rules; that way, only they can tell when they're breaking them.

Let me put it another way. Every basher's seen the Xaositects raving in the sprawling Bazaar and the stinking Hive of Sigil. Many of the poor sods are crazy and can't help it. Others, however, struggle mightily to be crazy, trying hard to throw off the shackles of restraint (no matter who might have put them there in the first place). It's hard to say which group has it worse and which the tanar'ri resemble more. But the truth of it is that both kinds of Xaositects typify tanar'ric nature: Barmy naturally and trying desperately to get even more so.

"Barmy" may be too strong a word; the tanar'ri are too canny to be dismissed as simple lunatics. But then, only one other word can describe a whole race of creatures with no structure: chaotic.

GETTING ◆ WHAT YOU WANT ◆ Jessyme Rauch

Think that the only activity in the Abyss is the constant struggle of lesser fiends plotting and scheming against one another, fighting mad battles to the death and beyond? It's true — almost. But not quite. The higher fiends and even the Abyssal lords plot and scheme and fight just as much. They just prefer to do it with more subtlety than the weaker tanar'ri. And when subtlety fails? Well, it's not hard for a layer's lord to round up a squad of warriors to lay siege to a rival's fortress.

The Abyss holds innumerable such strongholds. Some are built of iron, others of fire-hardened and magically enhanced clay, and still more of serpents mortared together with the essence of pain. It seems there's no substance that hasn't been used to create a fortress. But all of them have been treated and tested to stand true. After all, sieges come frequently in the Abyss. Hardly a day goes by without an assault on some castle somewhere. It might be a matter of territory or insults or simple mean-spiritedness. It might have no reason at all. The tanar'ri act as they will.

Thus, because it's nearly impossible for the fiends to prepare themselves for all the attacks that might come, especially when they have their own violence to commit, they try to hold their enemies at bay with politics. They hope to buy time to marshal their defenses, offenses, or supposed allies. Political maneuvering is one of the few ways they can forestall a war until they're ready for it.

Of course, the tanar'ri don't have the complicated, rigorous political system favored by the baatezu. Quite the reverse, in fact. Politics in the Abyss is just a matter of who holds the greater power — in numbers, strength, magic, and reach — or who appears to. The tanar'ri throw their loyalty, such as it is, toward the stronger side unless they're personally threatened or believe that they're going to be threatened. In that case, they try to convince their fellows that they are strongest in order to gain allies against the apparent usurper.

When a fiend rises quite high in the Abyss, it has to start playing down its power while still maintaining its real strength. The tanar'ri like nothing better than toppling whatever someone else has built high. A fiend that portrays itself as almighty will soon find its limits tested by foes at every turn. Then again, if the fiend makes itself out to be too weak, that also opens the door to assault. It's a delicate balance. Who would have thought the tanar'ri could walk such a fine edge?

Strangely enough, the greatest among the tanar'ri do it so well that they often fool themselves. They feign strength and weakness as the need arises, but in order to be truly convincing, they must believe their own stories first. And it goes beyond merely putting on a good show. Remember: In the Abyss, as on the rest of the Outer Planes, strong belief can turn dreams into reality.

Politics is another arena in which the distinctions of least, lesser, greater, true, and guardian may take on importance. Though the labels are really just broad estimates of power, the tanar'ri themselves sometimes flaunt the terms to frighten a foe or put its mind at ease. For example, an alu-fiend might tell a band of dretches that since they're only least tanar'ri, they've got no chance against a lesser tanar'ri such as herself. Of course, if that same alu-fiend later faces a nabassu, she'll do her best to convince it that the divisions are meaningless. After all, she's got magic dancing at her fingertips, and no mere classification can hold her.

In short, Abyssal politics are based on the tanar'ri doing whatever they need to do from moment-to-moment to survive and thrive.

POS+URING

At the lower end of the power scale, tanar'ri politics tends to be that of tooth and nail, of which fiend can most effectively destroy another through sheer physical and magical strength. The more fearsome a creature looks, the more likely it is that lesser fiends avoid it or accede to its wishes. The weaker tanar'ri don't understand the subtleties of the high-ups. All they know is raw destructive might. While they desire that kind of power, they also shrink from those that currently possess it — or seem to.

Thus, when a higher tanar'ri wants to communicate with a lower, it adopts a brutally fierce form — something the lesser fiend, which equates appearance with strength, can understand. Of course, if a higher tanar'ri meets with another fiend of the same power level, it takes on a more subtly imposing shape. This need to deal with each other on many levels, low and high, may contain the seeds of the tanar'ri's shape-shifting abilities.

Interestingly, though the higher fiends no doubt despised the oppression they suffered back when they themselves were in weaker forms, they show no compunction about dishing it out now that *they* wield the power. They use lesser tanar'ri to prosecute their eternal vendetta against the baatezu, and they gather armies to assault anyone who disagrees with them. It's a vicious cycle of use and abuse, one that keeps the tanar'ri both evil and chaotic. After all, they reason, if it was done to them, they can do it to someone else.

Of course, among the highest members of the race — from true tanar'ri on up — the political games rely on more than just appearance and cruelty. They depend on posture, gestures, word choice, and scores of factors beyond the comprehension of lesser tanar'ri. Survival is no longer the only goal; the players seek dominion over the Abyss by extending their wills across the layers. Naturally, since the fiends are all out for themselves, the atmosphere is one of constant paranoia and hatred. Indeed, the high-ups never know what their foes might be planning, as they literally move without provocation or forethought.

And then we have the games of the Abyssal lords. Think the true tanar'ri cling stubbornly to their vision of what's best for the Abyss and the rest of the multiverse? Well, to use the vernacular, you ain't seen nothing yet. Each Abyssal lord holds to a personal vision, and each works at cross-purposes with the others. Though they may stand side by side now and then, they expect no less than betrayal from their compatriots every time, and most lords figure it's best to betray the others *first*. Alliances rise and fall with nary a single bond of trust. If one Abyssal lord grows too arrogant or dangerous, the others might band together to take him down a notch or two. They might marshal riotous armies, turn a familiar confidante against him, lock him up in one of the stale bubbles of Pandemonium's Agathion, or banish him to an interdicted layer of the Abyss where even the tanar'ri know fear.

On the other hand, they might fail. In the Abyss, nothing is certain. That's why the politics of the plane are so tur-

bulent. Indeed, the cardinal rule, a law that even the rampaging tanar'ri manage to obey, is this: Trust nothing and no one.

PARASITES OF POWER

Is there no way for the weaker fiends to deal with the harsh ministrations of the stronger? Well, there's outright revolt, but that rarely finds success. And the process of advancing to a tougher shape is a slow and difficult one. However, if a lower tanar'ri wants to find immediate release from the abuse of its betters, it might attach itself to a fiend of importance and become what's called a *parasite of power*.

The parasites are tanar'ri that give up their own drives and desires in order to make themselves more useful to one more powerful. They don't change their physical forms; they merely surrender their wills. For their chosen master, parasites perform any function, no matter how menial or humiliating. (See illustration at right) Why? Simply because they feel they won't amount to much on their own, and they want to ally themselves with a winner.

These tanar'ri are odd fiends indeed. They subjugate themselves utterly just for the privilege of saying they know and serve someone of importance. Truth is, they sacrifice their *own* chance at gaining that same kind of importance just to associate with a fiend that's more powerful, destructive, and interesting than they are. By doing so, they hope to make *themselves* seem more powerful, destructive, and interesting. The parasites learn all they can about their master and emulate his actions whenever possible, down to mannerisms, style of dress, and chosen enemies. Indeed, mortals have, on occasion, mistaken particularly adept parasites for their overlords. Chant is some parasites eventually overthrow their masters, having learned their lessons too well.

If another fiend tries to stand between a parasite and its master, the parasite feigns friendship for (and perhaps subservience to) the interloper, and then begins to commit its betrayals. And if two parasites go to war over which of them can better serve a mighty tanar'ri — well, the smarmy fiends understand each other and know how best to inflict great misery on their kind. Naturally, they do it with fiery relish.

Researchers have catalogued parasites ranging in power from the least drestches to fiends that might have been Abyssal lords themselves, had they not sacrificed their futures for this fascinating — but pitiful — display of sycophancy.

◆ ABYSSAL LORDS ◆ Xanrost

Hello, mortals! It is time now for you to learn about the Abyssal lords. Terrible are they, great creatures truly horrifying in their wickedness and power. Most of them spent eons rising through the many shapes of the tanar'ri. Some got where they are because they had mighty tanar'ri parents. Some got where they are because of a strange conjunction of Abyssal forces. Some got where they are because of no

good reason at all. For example, Urdlen of the gnomes and the Great Mother of the beholders both rule their own layers of the Abyss.

Is it easier for a tanar'ri to seize a layer and hold on to it? Or is it easier for a creature from the outside? Who cares? There do not seem to be any particular bad feelings between the two kinds of lords – at least, not any more than you would expect from powerful beings of chaos and evil. They all hate each other, and they work together and fight together without worrying about who comes from where. 'Course, an Abyssal lord's origins might make it easier for other lords to find an excuse to gang up on him. But why do they need excuses? These are Abyssal lords! They do what they want.

No matter. The lords are nearly as strong as deities. Stronger even than death slaadi. They rule over the layers of their plane, with all sorts of powers to play with and huge armies to boss around. Theirs are the whims by which the Abyss is run, if not tamed. The lords impose their chaos on the chaos, making it seem like not so much.

chaos, but beneath it seethes even more chaos.

Does the Abyss have an infinite number of layers? Yes. Xanxost has counted them. But the Abyssal lords are *not* infinite. Xanxost has led mercenary companies through several layers that were not ruled by anyone. Still, most layers do have lords, so there are more of them than anyone knows what to do with. If they could ever join forces long enough to assault the baatezu, the cursed lawful baatezu, the hated –

If they could ever join forces long enough to assault their enemies, they would surely win. Even the slaadi, even gods would be hard-pressed to stand against them. But this will never happen.

The Abyssal lords spend too much time fighting each other.

Before they can turn their attentions to other planes, they must first subdue their own.



Before they can do that, they must eliminate their rivals. The arrival? Xanxost thinks they should fight the slaadi way: one on one.

The tiefling Ice has asked Xanxost to name all of the Abyssal lords. Impossible! But Xanxost will do it. Xanxost will describe each Abyssal lord, starting with Zzyczesya – no, Alvarez – and continuing through to the end until every last one is here for all to see. Prepare yourselves, mortals. This may take some time.

ALVAREZ

Tanar'ri call him "The Purging Duke," but not when he might hear. Alvarez is most famous for the cruelty and brutality he shows his troops. Even the fiends fear the inventive tortures of those under the Duke's command. Slaadi do not, of course. Chant is the Duke was recently a mortal who proved so cleverly hateful that he won over the nalfeshnee who judged him. Xanxost heard he served only as a chasme and later a glabrezu (and for only three millennia) before ascending to his current form.

His current form: Alvarez takes the shape of an ordinary human male with oily, blue-black hair and immaculately pressed clothing. But look closer. See the light of insanity that burns in his eyes. The Duke rules Torturous Truth, the 57th layer of the Abyss, and he calls himself the inquisitor of the tanar'ri. Does a cambion show signs of having dealt with the baatezu – like maybe he starts to act too orderly? Oh! He will be "questioned" by Alvarez and his intensely loyal team. It is easy for them to be loyal when they are afraid they might be next. Alvarez has reminded the tanar'ri of the meaning of pain. All fiends in the Abyss fear the coming of his soldiers.

The Duke occasionally uses mortals and slaadi to send messages to his next victims or spy on suspected traitors. Xanxost would not do it, though. Anyone who does a bad job for the Duke does not live long enough to wonder if they should worry about not having done it right.

ELDANOTH

Once the Lord of the Undead ruled the 113th layer of the Abyss, where he used wards to keep many servants enslaved. But one day Kiaransalee threw the master out and broke the



wards. Out came many vassals, including Eldanoth, who is now trying to get mortals on the Prime Material Prime to worship him so he can become an Abyssal lord, too.

Eldanoth looks like a smiling male tiefling with snakes growing from his fingertips. He wants to become a power of crime and hatred, and his worship includes the ritual slaughter of criminals by criminals. Their spirits are said to feed his strength with their evil. They're evil.

Slaadi reports say that one of the old abandoned layers of the Abyss – somewhere in the 300s – is slowly being reshaped by Eldanoth. Snakes and manes already gather on the blasted plains outside a copper fortress that has risen from a rent in the earth. It is said that when Eldanoth journeys to a prime-material world, he leaves his body hidden in this fortress and projects his personality through the Astral Plane.

FRAZ URBLU

Xanxost had heard that Fraz Urblu, the Prince of Deception, left the Abyss and went to the Gray Waste. Now he hears the Prince has just returned to the Abyss after a lengthy imprisonment on the prime-material world of Oerth. He has taken control of Hollow's Heart, the 176th layer, and he is bending all his resources toward the destruction of mortals

for how they treated him. But oho! The Prince lost much of his strength while trapped, and he has to get it all back first. But Fraz Urblu is a canny lord, and he is slowly drawing together all the elements of his reign that were stolen away.

Xanxost has seen drawings of Fraz Urblu. He looks funny. He is a beautiful, hulking monster with a cruel face. His body is covered with short hair, and his ears look as though slaadi have been chewing on them. Two huge ebony wings protrude from his shoulders.

Fraz Urblu has no use for mortals except as slaves or food. It has been a long time since Xanxost has eaten.

LUPERCIO

Lupercio, the Baron of Sloth, is an ebony-colored creature with no distinct form. Light wraps around his body, so no one can see it much. But tales in Limbo tell of four signs of his presence.

The first sign is the fiendish smile that echoes from the dark well of Lupercio's face. When his sharpened teeth glitter in the blackness, get ready for the second sign: his basso

tittering cackle, a mixture of sounds that has been known to curdle even slaadi blood. The third sign is Lupercio's incredible strength; the tanar'i say there is nothing in the Abyss that the Baron can not lift. The fourth sign —

Three signs. A balor once told Xanxost that Lupercio is really the embodiment of the strength of darkness. But whatever Lupercio is, he goes back and forth between long periods of total sloth and short bouts of manic activity. So he either sits and sits and sits, or he flits around like a whole swarm of chaos imps. Even the other tanar'i do not know what to think. Lupercio leaves many tasks unfinished and spends them through others with blinding precision.

Tanar'i say the Baron is the lord of the Slugbed, the 128th layer of the Abyss. But Lupercio keeps little lairs on many other layers as well: cramped hovels, graceful castles, and dung-filled riverbeds. He has no definition.

LYNKHAB

Lady Lynkhab is a puzzle. She is deep depression and intense desire, both at the same time. A big book of names — the *Mors Mysterium Nominum* — says she is depressed because she did her job too well. What Xanxost means to say: Lynkhab expressed the idea of desire so perfectly that she became a disembodied force. But she reformed herself so she could continue her expression. Now she wishes she never took her body back. Oho! Too late.

Lynkhab has become a creature of pure will, too cohesive to move on to a new existence. She tries and tries, and she fails and fails. She can force herself out of her own memory and thus out of being for a time, but she is desire! And she is so strong that she always reappears after a day or two. That is why she is depression, too. She wants to become a true deity, but she is stuck right where she is. Just a poor little Abyssal lord.

"Course, Lynkhab is stuck in a physical form, but it does not always have to be the *same* form. She reads the desires in the hearts of others and feeds off their lusts. Xanxost would like to see what kind of slaadi she would make! Lately, Lynkhab takes the shape of a flame-haired, voluptuous elf with eyes of burning ice. The tanar'i say she owns the 297th layer (the Sighing Cliffs), but she also wanders the Abyss because no one — not even other lords — can hurt her. Sometimes she seeks out mortal adventurers in the Abyss and says, "Hello, please try to kill me!" If they fail, she puts them in the dead-book. So far, everyone has failed.

PALE NIGHT+

The Lady known as Pale Night is one of the oldest Abyssal lords. The *Mors Mysterium Nominum* book says she is also the mother of several others, including Graz'zt, Lupercio, and Vucarik of Chains. Xanxost will talk about him next. Pale Night is rarely seen outside her bone castle, which sits in the Endless Maze of Baphomet, the 600th layer. Her keep looks like a giant, grasping hand, and it is



guarded at all times by a horde of creeping claws and bones that move around all on their own. Slaadi say the castle itself can rise up and crush all who come against it.

Sometimes mortals who wander through Baphomet's mazes stumble across her castle. The Lady sends some of them on their way and keeps some of them for her collection of guardians. 'Course, if she thinks that one of her infernal children might be plotting against her, she sometimes gives the mortals the job of finding out.

The Lady Pale Night always appears as a female wrapped in a single shroud. But when the foul wind around her palace catches the edge of the garment, all who are around can see: There is no physical form inside! Her parasites talk and talk and talk about this. Is it a deliberate statement? Is it a curse? Is it time to eat yet? Xanxost is hungry. But the Lady hardly ever speaks. This leaves her servants to wonder.

VERIN

Verin is a slim, pale figure who serves the Abyssal lord Graz'zt. He is also known as Ztefano, and slaadi reports say he might be nothing more than a parasite — not a real lord at all. Verin does nothing to stop such talk. At the very least, he has contacts among all of the lords. If he can ask them for aid and favors, is he not powerful? Xanxost would say yes to that!

As one of Graz'zt's primary servants, Verin finds out all he can about the weaknesses of other Abyssal lords. Then, when Graz'zt tells him to, or whenever he feels like being evil, which is always, because he is a tanar'i, what was Xanxost saying? Anyway, Verin leaks his secret information to various other Abyssal lords and then sits back and watches them attack each other. None of the lords trust Verin, but they all fear him. After all, Verin might hold secrets that could be used against them, so they go along with whatever he says — to some extent.

Ztefano is more than just another name for this creature — it is another aspect. Who can say which is the true fiend? Xanxost can. No, wait — that is someone else. One aspect is pale; the other is dark. Both ooze spiritual slime. The only difference between them is that Ztefano has the power to travel undetected, while Verin is better known among all the lords of the plane.

ABYSSAL PRINCES

Xanxost is tired of writing about the Abyssal lords. He will finish the list some other day. Now he is moving on to another subject: the tanar'i known as Abyssal princes, which some people say are higher in rank than the lords and some say are lower.

Mortals might think that the princes stand greatest of all; after all, that is the way most hierarchies work. Well, it is not the way the tanar'i work. Tanar'i are like slaadi. They do not stand for other berks' rules. Being a prince in the Abyss does not really mean much. It is the lords who hold the real power.

Oops. Everything Xanxost just said might be wrong. It depends on what day it is. The tanar'i change their titles faster than a prime changes his mind, based on what is most likely to garner them more power and respect. But based on the current chant, the Abyssal lords are higher in rank. The princes are mighty fiends — always tanar'i, never outsiders — who gather on the Plain of Infinite Portals. That is the topmost layer of the Abyss. The princes live there in huge fortresses and command massive armies. They give themselves big, fancy titles and try to kill all the other princes so they can rise higher in the eyes of the teeming masses. Why do they do this? No one knows.

Wait, Xanxost remembers why. It is because they are looking to find a layer they can wrestle into submission, a place they can call their own and rule from as they grab more and more strength. Sometimes the princes send scouting parties down the conduits that riddle the Plain of Infinite Portals. Xanxost does not know any riddles about the Plain. But the scouts go down in search of layers that are unclaimed and ripe for conquest.

That is the true difference between an Abyssal prince and an Abyssal lord. A prince controls a citadel and a stretch of land on the Plain of Infinite Portals. A lord actually controls a layer, watching it respond to his wishes almost as a power's realm responds to the deity. That is not to say an Abyssal lord is necessarily a power — at least not yet. Some truly are gods, but most are just dreamers.

CONTROLLING A LAYER

What does it mean to rule a layer of the Abyss? Merrshaulk (the yuan-ti power) and Ramenos (the god of the bullywugs) both live in Smaragd, the 74th layer. Xanxost is sure that both would claim to be the lord of Smaragd. And Kali, a human goddess, named the entire 643rd layer for her home there, the Caverns of the Skull. Is she the Abyssal lord of the layer? Most people say yes. It seems some gods are considered lords of a layer just because they happen to live there.

Fine. The strongest blood on a layer can say he is the lord. Why does Xanxost care? 'Course, being an Abyssal lord takes more than just finding empty ground and marching over it with an army. Force is not enough. Anyone who wants to be a lord must do three things: Drive the natives of a layer into submission, and shape the land itself to fit his will and vision. Two things.

That is where most Abyssal princes fail — they do not have enough strength in their heads to dominate a whole layer. Why is it so hard? The tanar'i say that Abyssal layers are sentient. Not smart — just aware. The layers have primal urges and abilities. They respond to their masters and can swallow unworthy berks whole. So if a prince tries to take over a layer but does not have enough force of will, he gets absorbed into the land. It is the price of failure in the Abyss. And that means Xanxost is hungry. No, it means that each prince who tries to seize a layer and fails becomes part of the land's power used to resist the next prince. You have heard that even the tanar'i are afraid of some layers of the

Abyss? Those are the layers — the ones full of berks that tried to rule them.

The problem with Abyssal layers is that they need sustenance. Suss ten ants? And they constantly need bigger and stronger princes to nourish them. When they do not get their feed, they grow weaker and eventually slide away into nothingness. These poor, hungry layers get absorbed into other layers. There they shrink and become little realms, and that is how they stay unless they can lure other prince-food to their land. But sometimes a layer clings too much to life to fall away like that, and it makes a deal with a prince who wants to rule it — as long as the fiend can convince the layer that it would be best for both of them to work together.

Abyssal princes and other challengers are not the only ones who risk going into the ground. An Abyssal lord, too, can melt into his own layer if he is not careful. When that happens, the lord becomes an extension of the layer he has crafted. He turns into the living embodiment of the land itself. Taking on a shell of a body begins to become a chore. Oh! The lord had better watch out, because if he disintegrates much further, he will be gone. Then the layer is ready for a new master to try his hand at ruling.

Xanxost has much more to say, mortals. But he is too hungry to write now. Maybe later.

PROSECUTING + THE BLOOD WAR + *Telson Splithorn*

Some folks say the Blood War is everything the tanar'ri live for, that they grow old and perish fighting, fighting, fighting. Well, that's right enough for some of the fiends. It's no dark that the true tanar'ri push vigorously for the rest of the race to crush the baatezu out of existence. Vast companies of disorganized armies disband every day from Durao (the 274th layer of the Abyss), spreading chaos and havoc across the Lower Planes — and sometimes the Middle and Upper Planes, too. Clawing and screaming, the fiends launch themselves like arrows from a bow, raining down on any sod who stands in their way.

'Course, they're mowed down by the millions by the steadfast and disciplined baatezu. Toe-to-toe, the tanar'ri fight like — well, like fiends. But they've got to get there first, and that's why the commanders send in the lowest ranks. See, the true tanar'ri need the berks at the bottom of the power scale to march in and soften up the baatezu (or at least distract 'em for awhile). Once their foes're bruised and bloody, the big shots can move in and slay 'em without nearly as much trouble. Sure, the true tanar'ri lose plenty of troops that way, but it doesn't seem like the Abyss'll run out of new fiends any time soon.

No one really knows why the true tanar'ri are so eager to push the Blood War. Maybe they figure it's their mission to get rid of the baatezu, or maybe they just want to strip the skin of law from the face of evil. In any case, it's a safe bet to say that nearly all true tanar'ri have a vested interest

in keeping the war raging. Whether they gain power for themselves or just get to watch their hated enemies crumble (which ain't bad, either), the true tanar'ri seem only to benefit by forcing the lesser fiends to fight.

But the true tanar'ri aren't the be-all and end-all of the Abyss. Many lords of the layers weigh in on the issue as well. Some of 'em, like Sess'innek, lock themselves away from the conflict entirely. Others, like Alvarez, scheme more against their fellows than against the baatezu. And still others, like Graz'zt, work to end the Blood War (at least temporarily) so the tides of evil can unite and flow against the forces of good. Truth is, there are as many approaches to the Blood War as there are Abyssal lords, and not one of 'em agrees with the others in all the particulars. Much like the rest of the tanar'ri, really.

◆ IN SUMMARY ◆ *Jessyme Rauch*

Purveyors of ill intent and creatures of utter cruelty, it's likely that the tanar'ri are the most mean-spirited and thoroughly evil monsters in existence. They view life as a nuisance. They see the living as toys to be savagely abused and then discarded. They care for nothing but themselves, and they don't even care about themselves all that much. The tanar'ri act in accordance only with their own desires, and whatever hidden motives drive those desires are so debauched and depraved that a body'd be better off not knowing anything about them.

A fool who travels willingly to the Abyss deserves whatever he gets. An addle-cove who deals willingly with the tanar'ri deserves no more than death — and he'd be lucky to get even that. The tanar'ri are destructive, petty, and hateful, proud to exemplify all the worst that can come from chaos.

Just hope they don't win the Blood War.

MAL ARUNDAK: ◆ THE CITY OF CONFUSION ◆ *(Town)*

CHARACTER. In a breath of air, the rot of the dead assaults the ears. A riot of color scours the tongue. A scream rakes across flesh, and the disjointed feel of cinnamon echoes through the halls of the mind. Purification of the body is paramount; those who fail shall perish.

RULER. The fallen trumpet archon Alusiel watches over the city. Unfortunately, the archon doesn't realize that she is fallen. Alusiel still believes herself to be a good cutter and considers herself an avid foe of all that is chaotic and evil (even though she's become chaotic evil). The trouble started long ago, when she accepted the task of escorting a lost spirit back to Mount Celestia. Unbeknownst to Alusiel, she

took the wrong spirit, one that planted seeds of malice in her heart. Whispering words of power into the archon's ear, this dark spirit turned her toward the Abyss — but not before Alusiel had also infected a handful of her brethren by sharing with them the trickster's wicked promises.

Now Alusiel seeks to be a candle of hope in the Abyss, to ease the tormented souls back into the light of truth and purity. She wants to cleanse the spirits of all those who come to her city, so that her charges can emerge from Mal Arundak fresh and ordered. No one ever has.

BEHIND THE THRONE. Alusiel maintains her entourage of archons that were lured away from the Mount, trusting them just enough to make sure the city is secured. Or so they think. But tainted by the lure of the Abyss, Alusiel trusts none of her minions — for such have they become — at all. She fears they'll try to wrest the city from her, and she won't let that happen; she knows that only *her* way can purify the mortals who wander into her land.

DESCRIPTION. In the heart of the Rainless Waste (the 403rd layer), where the parched desert soil holds rifts wide enough to swallow a town, sits Mal Arundak — the City of Confusion. Perched on the edge of a sulfur-belching rift, Mal Arundak is a tiny dot in the vast, dusty landscape that surrounds it. The city's gained the reputation as a burg of trade — or at least the nearest thing the Abyss can muster — but, in truth, Mal Arundak is much more.

To reach the city, a body need only journey to the Plain of Infinite Portals (the first layer of the Abyss) and pass through a huge triangular portal made of a mixture of copper, iron, and silver. (The key is a broken feather from any bird.) Mal Arundak itself is much like its doorway: roughly triangular with walls of copper, iron, and silver to shield it from the elements and the occasional tanar'i siege. The walls are 33 feet thick and stand over 100 feet high. Squadrons of weary archons pace atop the walls, casting their peery eyes over all those who approach.

The landscape around the city's walls is dull and dreary, but inside, Mal Arundak is a riot of confusion and fear. Only the Grand Market (and the roads to and from it) remains somewhat calm, for it's a place where travelers go to purchase whatever they might want or need, from a simple skin of wine to their deepest heart's desire. Three main roads lead to the Market, one from each of the three gates. But if a visitor strays from the three roads or the Market, the true nature of the city becomes apparent.

See, Alusiel designed Mal Arundak to purge the impurities from mortal flesh. She weaves a net of illusion and reality throughout the city to tempt and repulse those who come here, and no one can tell what is real and what is illusion until they've grasped for it.

Here's the dark of it: An invisible web, spun from the hidden palace of Alusiel, blankets much of Mal Arundak. Whenever a sod brushes up against a strand of that web, the city conjures an image of his fondest desire. If he pursues his dream, he's given everything he ever wanted in a flood

of sensory impressions. The deluge never ends, and that's why many say Mal Arundak is a city of barmies; the dream-cursed are a common sight in the streets.

Those who live here permanently do so in constant denial of their desires. They don't dare pursue anything they want, for fear that they'll be driven mad. Thus, the residents have taken to indulging their mental appetites, spinning fantasies and tales of depravities that would shock even a tanar'i. By repressing the desire for physical goods and pleasures, Alusiel's created the supreme market for those whose taste in vice runs to the mental.

Mal Arundak is a welter of impressions. The stately mansions of philosophers loom on one side of a broad avenue, while the hovels of the poor and miserly squat on the other. Yet the kips boast more beauty in their careful design, and the fine houses are squalid and filled with vermin. This is the city of denial, and what appears to be beautiful on the outside rots on the inside.

MILITIA. The city really needs no militia. Alusiel's illusions tempt and destroy most wrongdoers long before they even realize what's happening to them. But since some can resist her web of dreams, a company of hound archons maintains the peace. Whereas Alusiel's law says that villains must be destroyed, the hound archons recognize the value of mercy, even in the Abyss. They often allow minor criminals a chance at escape, though a second offense brings destruction down. Still, it shouldn't be long before the archons lose hold of their lawful goodness entirely.

SERVICES. The Market holds anything a visitor might want. Beyond the confines of the Market, a body should stick to finding a place to eat and a place to sleep. The desire for anything other than those most basic needs might offend Alusiel; depending on her mood, even a simple swig of bub might be forbidden. Fortunately, Mal Arundak features many inns that cater to all manner of mortal planewalkers. Naturally, fiends aren't welcome in the city, though that doesn't stop them from trying to gain entrance.

LOCAL NEWS. Chant is Alusiel's spiraling ever further into insanity, that she's already half-tanar'i (with powers beyond those of most archons) and ready to take the next step. Whether she intends to or not, she's changing, and if she doesn't leave the Abyss soon, she'll be stuck there forever. Some folks even whisper that she's losing her grasp on the city, that a lesser archon has realized the folly of trying to run a burg in the Abyss and plans to forcibly remove Alusiel when the time is right.

The city's surprisingly extensive underground believes that Alusiel maintains control over Mal Arundak only through the use of an ebon stone that reflects light like a crystal. The gang bosses who operate out of the Grand Market would pay a pretty piece of jink to anyone who steals the stone (if it even exists) from Alusiel's ever-shifting palace.

MAL ARUNDAK

KEY

1. SLUMS
2. PHILOSOPHERS' ROW
3. THE INNS
4. SEWAGE DUMP
5. FLEA-MARKET+
6. THE ARBREUM
7. THE MAZE OF PAIN
8. THE SHABES
9. LAW'S REST+
10. BLADES AND CHAINS
11. THE GRAND MARKET+
12. BARRACKS
13. THE FERDION OF FLAME
14. THE SECRET PALACE OF ALUSIEL
15. THE TEMPLE OF PLEASURE
16. AQUASPHERE
17. THIEVES' QUARTER
18. THE HEIGHTS
19. CHARRENHOUSE
20. THE DEPHS
21. THE CLOUDED TUNNELS
22. ORCHARD
23. SLAVE MARKET+
24. TOWER OF LIGHT+

THE IRON WAY

SCALE IN FEET+



COPPER ROAD



THE YUGOLOTHS

To think like a yugoloth, you first have to empty your heart and mind of all you have learned in the past. You must achieve a state of unity with yourself, fully accepting all that you are today and all that you might be in the future.

Bid farewell to that self and float. Float in the darkness of your empty spirit. Now open the doors of your spirit and allow thoughts of Evil to filter in. Not "evil," mind you, but Evil. Petty larcenies and mild misdeeds mean nothing to you. You have your eyes on a much grander prize than the price of a mortal life. You want nothing less than the multiverse itself under your heel . . . yet still you are not the master of your destiny. After all, you have sold yourself to Evil. You are no more than a pawn on a chessboard, and no matter how high you strive to ascend, there will always be something mightier than you.

Does this then mean that you cease your striving?

That recognizing your own insignificance means that you

stop all struggle for life? It does not. Any

effort you make, no matter how small, adds to the total. If you can tilt the balance with your weight, you seek to do so. And you seek to draw others to do so as well.

What means do you use to accomplish these ends? Bullying works well on the less intelligent and the fearful. Sincere flattery works best on the insecure. Gold and gems win over those disposed toward greed. The offer of knowledge and power lures the would-be tyrants. You use any means at your disposal, always promising more. You draw all into your web, and once your pawns are trapped, you can place them anywhere on the playing field you desire.

Best of all, once the puppets have been gulled by seeing what they can achieve (remember to give them only a glimpse of that achievement, allowing them to do the actual work themselves), they'll pursue that end to the exclusion of all others. At that point, they're little more than rag dolls in your hands.

Some, of course, will not succumb to your blandishments. They are the better adversaries, the true challenges. Still, with foresight and planning — and perhaps even a bit of luck — the necessary factors will converge to drive the resistant foes straight into your arms.

Do you see? Though the yugoloths seek to become ascendant over all the creatures of the multiverse, though they jostle for position among themselves, their very lives are dedicated to the furthering of Evil. If they can add one more spirit to the side of darkness, if they can draw in millions of primes with simple words and sacrifices, they'll do it. They hate to give anything of themselves but they'll do even that, if necessary.

In short, yugoloths are the worst kind of fanatics, the sort who tenaciously do whatever it takes to realize their goals. They've spent countless cons scheming to drag the multiverse toward the pole of Evil, and they've laid their webs in every corner of the planes. They love nothing more than a challenge, and they seek out — and annihilate — any and all challenges to the supremacy of their guiding force.

— the Unnamed

MOVE ALONG.
WE'RE NOT THE FIENDS
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.
— AN ARCANALOTH
PLAYING MIND GAMES
WITH MORTALS



◆ THE LIES OF TRUTH ◆

Enkillo the Sly

Look alive, berks, I've got loads to say and little time to say it. In my youth I walked from Mechanus to Limbo and every place in between, and folks everywhere always seemed to toss the same chant: The yugoloths are creatures of purest evil, the living representations of the worst the Lower Planes have to offer. They're said to survive by any means possible, drawing power through bluff, trickery, and a level of manipulation that makes the baatezu look like sodding primates.

'Course, all this is simply *said*. I've found precious little proof that the yugoloths meddle in anything more than the sale of arms and mercenaries to other fiends. And the 'loths sell themselves as much as possible. Their bashers spread across the Lower Planes like scum on a pond, signing up with whoever fronts 'em the most jink. That makes 'em invaluable. Naturally, those same 'loths occasionally follow their own desires instead and turn stag on their employers. That makes 'em hated.

Like I said, speculation's everywhere. Folks can't stop rattling their bone-boxes about the yugoloths, even though the 'loths try to quash idle rumors and chitchat whenever possible — that is, unless it serves their purpose to let certain bits of the chant get passed on. See, despite their denials to the contrary, yugoloths are masters of manipulation. They know how to play most any berk they run across, using their top-shelf instincts for reading expressions and sensing intents. The best of 'em can turn a basher into a 'loth mouthpiece without ever letting the fool know what's happened. He'll run around spilling the secrets he's "stolen" without realizing he's spreading chant the 'loths want spread.

The hardest part for the fiends, or so the theory goes, is coordinating their hidden truths and skillfully woven lies. The yugoloths almost always play down their involvement in any action — unless they're too proud to keep quiet or they get caught red-handed pulling someone's strings. And even then, they shrug it off as a fluke, a rare occurrence. Fact is, the canny fiends have a way of denying accusations that makes the questioner doubt himself.

Even happens to an old experienced planewalker like myself from time to time. For example, here's part of a chat ol' Enkillo had on Gehenna with a golden-furred arcanaloth named Alcain Fem'at:

AF: I'm sorry, but I'm not entirely sure of what it is that people expect of us. Mortals seem to think of us as monsters of blackest evil, manipulative predators that serve as handy scapegoats every time a bariaur sniffls or a slaad sneezes. I'll tell you now, *I* certainly don't have that kind of control over other people's actions, and I don't know many yugoloths that *do*. I will admit that a few of our number can't seem to let go of the belief that they must be evil incarnate. After all, we yugoloths are said to be the force that balances the baatezu and the tanar'i, so we must be as wicked and base as they are, mustn't we?

Take this down, if you would: We are simply mer-

chants, if you feel the need to classify us so simply. We see the possibilities inherent for profit in the Blood War, and we act accordingly. We do the same in conflicts across *all* planes. To suggest that we control and steer these conflicts is utterly preposterous. If, on occasion, we seize an opportunity to gain ourselves the greatest profit, what of it? Any merchant in Sigil would do the same, yet no one accuses them of manipulating the entire multiverse.

EtS: Really? What about the yugoloth texts that brag about controlling baatezu like marionettes? What about the thousands of times 'loth mercenaries turned stag on signed contracts just so they could steer the Blood War toward greater carnage? And what about the rumor that your race has somehow robbed the tanar'i and baatezu of their power to teleport around the planes?

AF: As to the first, I'm curious to know how you got access to those texts. But the truth is, we *meant* for those fictions to be discovered solely to gain a greater edge in our bargains with the baatezu. After all, if a client fears that you know more than he does, he'll often pay through the nose. As to the second, I'm sure the contracts you speak of were broken under the direct orders of our commanders, acting on their own discretion, to further yugoloth profits. And as to the third . . . well, you know rumors. We've been blamed for the wars on Acheron as well.

EtS: Hold it, berk. If you meant for those sodding books to be discovered, doesn't that imply a strong bit of manipulation — sneaking around behind the scenes?

AF: My boy, that's one small instance, a simple matter of business. The conspiracy theories levelled against us deal with manipulation on a much more cosmic scale. Really, it's ridiculous — even laughable — to think that we could possess such power. Why, if we did, we'd have long since taken over the multiverse, I would think.

Oh, dear . . . I seem to have a prior appointment. You will forgive this intrusion, I trust? I bid you good travels, little tiefling.

That's when a sodding nycaloth hustled me out the door. I couldn't spy who the arcanaloth met with next, and try as I might (a story for another time), I couldn't get back in to see the berk. So that makes me think that Alcain wanted me to believe exactly what I believe now. But that makes me question myself. I know that Alcain was probably a liar, but *he* knows that I'd think that, but *I* know that he'd know I was on to him, but *he* knows that I know that he'd know that I was on to him . . .

See what I mean about devious games, about wheels within wheels? The 'loths can't be trusted, plain and simple. The only thing to do is pay close attention to every syllable they utter, 'cause there's no telling which word might hold the key to their plans or peels. Better yet, stand back and watch 'em weave their webs from a distance. That's the only way to avoid their snares. Make no mistake. Despite their little smiles and claims of innocence, the yugoloths're born of evil. If they pretend to kind-heartedness, a body can be sure it's just a ruse.

◆ IN + THE BEGINNING ◆

Mowatt Ke'Mahn

Although I am firstly a hunter and a celebrated leader of warriors, I've led enough charges against the yugoloths to say that I know my enemies quite well. Their beginnings have been lost so far back in time that not even their own texts can bear any authority on the matter, but the yugoloths are generally agreed to have been spawned (perhaps by baernaloths) in the glooms of the Gray Waste, near the banks of the River Styx. Rising from the dusty plains of Oinos, the new fiends must have scrabbled toward civilization as so many other races have done throughout time.

However long that may have taken, their history (suspect, of course) tells us that they came to realize their own perfection, seeking to create themselves as the essence of evil, bringing all in the multiverse toward an understanding of their patron force. But upon closer examination, dear Reader, the yugoloths found themselves contaminated with traces of chaos and law and so had to find a way to expunge their spirits of these taints.

Yugoloth histories (most notably *The Book of Derelict Magick*, though scholars have recently unearthed others) posit that one ultroloth created a gem called the Heart of Darkness, which it used to "purify" the yugoloths. This magnificent jewel spilled the law and chaos into the forms of the larvae nearby, which were then herded to the Abyss and Baator, where they evolved into the baatezu and tanar'ri. As for the clever ultroloth, he went on to become the legendary figure known as the General of Gehenna, whose wisdom guides the race even today.

Is this tale a true one? Some certainly think it so. But I would be remiss if I failed to mention that current chant – especially talk on my beloved Upper Planes – brands the yugoloths as hopeless liars. Just yesterday, it seemed as if everyone and his imp were ready to believe that the 'loths were indeed the first and greatest evil planar race, that they did indeed create (directly or otherwise) the baatezu and tanar'ri. Of course, dear Reader, the idea that the yugoloths are less than truthful is hardly news, but regardless, I think I spy on the horizon a backlash against 'loth proclamations of superiority.

Still, the story of the General and his jewel certainly helps to explain why the yugoloths feel as though they can manipulate everything. Even if the tale of the Heart of Darkness is just a fable designed to make the yugoloths feel important, it's a terribly good one.

THE TRUES+ FIENDS

Of the three primary races of the Lower Planes – baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloth – the 'loths are the only fiends that don't arise from petitioners. They draw their strength directly from their planes of power: Gehenna (their new home) and the Gray Waste (their ancient birthplace). Granted, many baatezu and tanar'ri are spawned from their respective planes as well, but they supplement their numbers with fiends raised from petitioners. And the gehreleths derive their essence from their hideous god Apomps, not from the plane of Carceri.

It's easy to see, then, why the yugoloths arrogantly consider themselves the only true planar fiends.

Purged of the twin strains of law and chaos, they draw their reinforcements from the essence of the Lower Planes themselves. It's said that as soon as a yugoloth dies, another is reborn, spat out as a mezzoloth near the Wasting Tower on the Gray Waste or near the Tower of the Arcana-loths on Gehenna.

Legends say that these two spires (and perhaps another tower, locked away from mortal knowledge)

focus the energies of the Lower Planes, attracting the power of evil and harnessing it for the yugoloths. That implies, dear Reader, that there are always at least a certain number of yugoloths in existence. (I say "at least" because the fiends can also breed naturally, which increases their population.) Supposedly, only the destruction of one of the yugoloth towers can render the 'loths dead for any significant length of time.

True? False? Dear me, who can say? But it is true that the yugoloths *claim* to have rid themselves of law and chaos, *claim* to have driven these strains into larvae that would later evolve into the baatezu and tanar'ri. Scholars who believe this claim (what a notion!) have subsequently theorized that the yugoloths destroyed their own living spark when they drained the two ethical extremes from their spirits. That's why, some say, the fiends can't draw new recruits from larvae and why they've been forced to evolve their reinforcements from the planes.

Those who lurk in the underground of fiendish knowledge feel that while the purge may have eliminated the true spirit from the yugoloths, it has ensured that their race is filled with the essence of evil. Now all the yugoloths have to do is keep the popular perceptions of evil from changing. For if those basic notions change, the very stuff of the Lower Planes will change, and that could spell the end of all of the yugoloths' plans.

WHEN DEALING
WITH A YUGOLOTH,
EXPECT
THE UNEXPECTED —
AND THEN HIDE.

— PLANAR
COMMON SENSE

◆ THE SHAPES OF EVIL ◆

The Unnamed

The yugoloths are much like the baatezu, in that they spend most of their lives learning the lessons they need to advance to the next step of their evil existence. Those who succeed may shape the planes. Those who fail have only death to fear. After all, like all fiends, the high-ups of the race (and even the inferiors) do all they can to challenge a yugoloth's progress.

YUGOLOTH CREATIONS

First we have the canoloths and guardian yugoloths, two species created by the yugoloths proper to serve as lackeys and summoning stock. The canoloths, the "dogs" of the race, are thought to be mezzoloths stripped of their power and transformed into beings that will serve greater yugoloths faithfully. Sages aren't sure whether the transformation is a punishment or a steppingstone to greater power. Still, no yugoloth wants to be forced into canoloth form, for it's said that to be a canoloth is to give up the status of yugoloth entirely.

Guardian yugoloths aren't true members of the race, either. More powerful 'loths create them to heed the interminable summonings of mortals adde-coved enough to try calling a yugoloth without knowing its true name. The guardians are an answer to the letter of the binding, not the spirit. They take many forms, none of which mirror the reality of the yugoloths.

LESSER YUGOLOTHS

The lowest and most plentiful of the yugoloths are the mezzoloths, the brutal soldiers of the race. They're tough, insectile creatures, but they're not even as smart as the average human. Mezzoloths are the basic tools in the ultroloth chain of command, used only when subtlety and guile have been exhausted, only when there's a need for direct action. Oddly, though mezzoloths are the lowest in rank, they're not the weakest in strength.

A step up in rank, we find the dergholoths, which also serve as mercenaries in the yugoloth armies. They, too, are stupid, brutish, and malevolent, but they make excellent soldiers; their four arms let them parry as well as attack (and do much of both). It's said that this shape is a form of punishment, but, if so, it's one of the harshest the ultroloths can dish out. After all, stripping a creature of the knowledge it has accumulated is tantamount to total oblivion on the planes.

Above the dergholoths sit the piscoloths, the sergeants of the bottom two ranks, overseers and masters of the brutes of the race. They're powerful and frightening 'loths, to be sure, but they're also despised by those they command — and more than a few wind up dead or missing. If a body accounts only for direct treachery, he'll find that the rank of piscoloth is one of the most rapidly filled and emptied positions in yugoloth society. (Higher-ranking yugoloths tend to

keep their struggles more subtle.) The hated, bullying fiends often wind up splattered across the rocks on the banks of the River Styx.

Next come the hydroloths, the scouts and guides of the yugoloth forces. They swim in the Styx fearlessly, knowing that their memories are protected against the draining power of the black waters; this makes them especially valuable in the Blood War. Still, the hydroloths know they're just pawns, and they desperately try to reach the level of yagnoloth, where, though hated, they can at least stand back from the carnage of the war. Hydroloths learn to trade in information rather than pure muscle, moving from the physical realm to the mental. Slowly, slowly they grasp at how to change their station.

Nearing the upper end of the lowest ranks, we find the brutish and misshapen yagnoloths. These fiends — one arm huge and mighty, one arm puny and weak — rule over the yugoloth lands by order of the ultroloths. Yagnoloths marshal the armies of their fiefs and guard Gehenna and the Gray Waste against invaders — that is, when they can be bothered. It seems the yagnoloths prefer to do as little as possible, living instead off the labor of their underlings. Still, the ultroloths grant them wide judiciary powers — yagnoloths can command *any* yugoloth in their domain, all the way up to the rank of arcanoloth — so the rest of the race must reluctantly tolerate their brutal rule.

Are the ultroloths ignorant of this laziness and hatred? No. The status of the yagnoloths serves to remind all members of the race how easily a small being can be made to seem large, and how even a petty creature can bring down its betters if given enough power. The yagnoloths are the butt of jokes from above, which they do not realize, and the target of hatred from below, which they recognize all too well.

Finally we have the skeletal marraenoloths, which some call "the in-between," a middle ground between the lesser and greater yugoloths. Having left behind the burdensome rank of yagnoloth, the marraenoloths learn the value of material wealth (payment for their services) and the twisting patterns of thought mastered by the greater yugoloths (as embodied in the Styx). As the boatmen of the dark river, the marraenoloths absorb complete knowledge of the waterway's every bend and swirl, and the fiends see it echoed in the multiverse around them. And, as ferrymen for the fiendish armies, marraenoloths also learn the rudiments of making — and breaking — contracts.

GREATER YUGOLOTHS

A triad of greater yugoloths — the nycaloths, arcanoloths, and ultroloths — are the makers of policy and the fiends responsible for hewing the race's path to ascendance. All lesser yugoloths previously described are simply tools used to bring that goal to fruition. That is the essential divide between the rank of lesser and greater.

The least of the greater yugoloths, the nycaloths are the observers and scouts of the Blood War. They often carry enchanted axes, many of which are said to be vorpal weapons.

Nycaloths watch the battlefields and pass their findings straight on to the arcanaloths. Their role is critical; their observations help the arcanaloths determine exactly where to allot the yugoloths' strength, which in turn allows the ultroloths to plot the course to victory.

Next in the chain of command are the jackal-headed arcanaloths, yugoloths too keen to be dulled by mind-affecting magic. These clever fiends keep the contracts of the Blood War, assigning yugoloth mercenary companies to the baatezu and tanar'i - and deciding the costs of such services. Indeed, the war is highly profitable for the yugoloths, and with the stroke of a pen, an arcanaloth can make or break its own wealth and reputation. They enact the policy of the yugoloths, delegating the troops and dooming one fiendish army while saving another (at least, for today).

Of course, the arcanaloths all take their orders from the ultroloths, who watch the vast sweep of the battles and determine when the mercenaries should betray one side or the other. The faceless ultroloths (a more apt form than most folks realize) are some of the most feared creatures in the entire multiverse. Though solars and certainly powers are stronger, it's said that few have longer reaches than the ultroloths, and fewer still can hide their knowledge from these ruthless fiends. Truly, the most effective weapon the ultroloths have is their reputation - no fool in his right mind would dare to cross them.

Although the ultroloths are the highest-ranking members of their race, they're physically indistinguishable from one another. The only differences are in how they dress and how they seek to pursue yugoloth interests. Ultroloths provide the vision that guides the race; they're the secret source of all modern 'loth scheming (and, no doubt, all past scheming as well). In the eons it takes for a yugoloth to ascend to this lofty rank, it learns to spin its webs far and wide. As a result, many folks fear ultroloths on the basis of their knowledge alone. Their contacts supposedly span even the Prime Material and the Inner Planes, and the forces an ultroloth can bring to bear on a foe can be as mild as a message and as mighty as the destruction of a planet.

THE OINOLOTH

The nominal leader of the yugoloth race, the Oinoloth commands all from Khin-Oin, the dreaded Wasting Tower of Oinos (the first layer of the Gray Waste). The status of Oinoloth isn't a new or horrifying shape; it's merely a posi-

tion, and it can be held by only one yugoloth at a time - invariably, an ultroloth. Of course, the job is a precarious one. Most ultroloths wish to sit in the throne known as the Siege Malicious, and they lay their schemes to further their ambitions, not caring who's crushed under their wheels of power, deceit, and betrayal. Naturally, a few care nothing for gaining the seat of power - but only if they can control the reins of the one who does.

The current Oinoloth is an ultroloth named Mydiancharus, a relatively recent arrival to the Siege. Already its enemies marshal their forces to topple the new ruler and take the mantle for themselves. However, Mydiancharus is no easy mark; rumor says it single-handedly ousted the previous Oinoloth, an incredibly powerful ultroloth known as Anthraxus. But the battle wasn't a physical one. Mydiancharus is said to have whispered to Anthraxus a single secret of such profound and disturbing insight that the latter fiend was compelled to leave Khin-Oin and move on. Anthraxus is now trying to offer his services to various powers of the Lower Planes.

BAERNALOTHS

Above the ultroloths, above the Oinoloth, above even the General of Gehenna sit the baernaloths - that is, if the legendary creatures exist at all. These pustular fiends supposedly created the entire yugoloth race back in a time before history and then later vanished, leaving the ultroloths in charge. But whether that story is true or the baernaloths are simply myths spread by the ultroloths to justify their own rule, the fact is that most of the yugoloth race *believes* in the existence of the baernaloths. To them, it is true, and they live their lives as if it *were* true. For the rest of us, that means it's just as good as true.

A handful of plane-walkers here and there have claimed to have met a baernaloth on their travels, which pokes holes in the notion that only the ultroloths know where to find their reclusive fathers. These mortals reported that the baernaloths denied having created the yugoloths, though they admitted offering advice to so-called worthy ultroloths (most notably, the General of Gehenna). This guidance is said to take the form of secrets about the other fiendish races, and word among the yugoloths is that these secrets have proven tried and true over and over again.

Of course, since all knowledge from the baernaloths filters down only through the ultroloths, it's possible that the faceless fiends twist it to their own ends.

PROMOTION ◆ AND PURIFICATION ◆ *Enkillo the Sly*

Yugoloths don't climb through the ranks like the baatezu or tanar'ri do. See, when a lawful fiend advances, it's only got a few places to go. The chaotic fiends ain't so confined; they can try to transform themselves into anything they set their minds to. But the yugoloths walk the straightest road of all, moving from mezzoloth to dergholoth to piscoloth and so on and so on, until the luckiest bloods reach the status of ultroloth. They can't skip ranks just because of a good record or a tough will. They've got to do time in each form, learning as they go.

The promotion of a 'loth depends on a few factors. First of all, the fiend in question must've served well in its current rank. (No screw-ups need apply.) Second, the 'loth must've tumbled to the lessons built into its current rank. (For example, when a lowly mezzoloth finally opens its eyes to the fact that it can easily lay a dergholoth "superior" low, it earns a shot at promotion; it's learned that command don't always mean physical power.) And last, the 'loth's got to believe, with all its dark heart, in the purity of evil and the necessity of evil's triumph.

'Course, it ain't as easy as all that. See, a 'loth has to plot and protect against intrigue from three sides: from above, where the high-ups try to defend their own positions against up-and-comers; from its own level, where its peers do whatever it takes to make sure *they* get ahead instead; and from below, where the scheming and teeming masses may decide to show off their own potential by knocking off their superiors.

Chant is that all yugoloth promotions follow a basic pattern. First, the berk in question has to show its immediate high-ups what a fine job it's doing learning the ins and outs of, well, *yugolothness*. It petitions them for a review and fully demonstrates its brains and skill — which can take years, decades, or even centuries, depending on how quickly the superiors want to proceed. If the high-ups decide they're impressed by the candidate's evil and insight, they suggest the promotion to *their* high-ups.

That's where lots of promotions fall apart. See, the next level of superiors pepper the candidate with even more questions and challenges to see if it's truly worthy. If they find the sod lacking, they punish the 'loths who recommended it in the first place — usually by flaying off their skin and exiling them for a time — and then they demote or destroy the candidate in the furnaces of Gehenna. Let me tell you, that really makes a candidate think twice about whether it's ready, and it definitely makes the berk's bosses look at it long and hard before daring to recommend it for promotion.

If, on the other hand, the judges find the candidate worthy, well, the next step is to wipe away all the faults it's accumulated in life and make it, in essence, a clean slate for the new fiend to come. 'Course, they don't want to get rid of the *useful* lessons of its previous forms; that's why they go through the process of the Purification. It's a painful ritual,

one that invariably involves the outer death of the 'loth's form — the stripping away of the living shell. (The rituals'd give balers nightmares; I spied on one as I passed between portals in Mungoth one time, and I nearly gouged out my own eyes to block out the sight. But that's a story for another time.) Once the Purification is complete, the new fiend arises, ready to take its place in the yugoloth hierarchy. Naturally, it's got to prove itself all over again before it gets another shot at moving up.

Like I said before, there ain't no short-cuts. A yugoloth's got to move up one rank at a time. What's worse, chant is it's got to spend at least a few centuries — and often millennia — in a particular shape before its next promotion. That takes patience. Some can handle the wait, always keeping their eyes on the next rank to come, always plotting and planning and showing their worth. Others either can't bide their time or just accept the fact that they don't have the drive to succeed. These 'loths don't worry so much about advancement and content themselves with spreading evil at their current rank. After all, they're still fiends, still more powerful and more feared than most berks on the planes.

◆ ROGUE YUGOLOTHS ◆ *Mowatt Ke'Mahn*

Both tanar'ri and baatezu have rogues among their number, fiends who cast aside the teachings of their kind and embrace the lessons of others — perhaps even the noble ideals of upper-planar beings like myself. It stands to reason that the yugoloths might also fall prey to this "affliction" (though I prefer to consider it a blessing).

Now, I'm not speaking of the kind of betrayal so common to the yugoloths, the least loyal of all the fiends. I'd bet that hardly a day goes by on the Lower Planes that a troop of mezzoloths doesn't avenge themselves on their tyrannical piscoloth commander, or a cabal of a dozen arcanoloths doesn't fall apart as they all secretly sell each other down the river. Yugoloths who turn in this manner aren't rogues; they're merely being true to their natures.

A few real rogues spring to mind, but even these may not be true traitors. It's thought that the gehreleth god — the unsightly being known as Apomps — is an exiled yugoloth, and the ferocity with which the gehreleths attack all things yugoloth would certainly seem to bear out that assumption. And there are others like A'kin, the arcanaloth who runs the Friendly Fiend trinket shop in Sigil (though A'kin often entertains fiendish callers, and I believe he's simply skilled at masking his true intentions).

The dark of it, dear Reader — at least as most bloods have it — is that the yugoloths viciously prosecute the traitors among their number, driving them forth and killing them at all costs. Why, during a raid I led on the Gray Waste, I personally witnessed a 'loth mercenary company practically ignore their attackers — that is, me and my pack of lupinals — to concentrate on chasing and slaying a pis-

cloth that sought to switch sides. Do the yugoloths have such great secrets that even lesser 'loths who turn stag must be silenced? Or are the fiends simply vindictive monsters who refuse to let one of their number slip away? I've heard of many a dissatisfied yugoloth that has chosen self-induced oblivion over desertion from the ranks.

Of course, there are some yugoloths that disagree with the prevailing political mood of the race, but, dear me, that doesn't make them *rogues*. (Some of the most loyal guardians on Elysium are those that question the orders of our leaders.) If these "rebellious" yugoloths were to speak their minds too freely, they might be tormented until they either recant or demonstrate the validity of their "dangerous ideas," but they're still welcomed back into the fold. As long as they don't try to cause dissension or abandon the general goal of raising evil to dominance, they're allowed to live.

Some have it that yugoloths are incapable of true change, that their spirits are so filled with the essence of evil that they can't help but be evil, completely and irreversibly. Since the fiends don't arise from petitioners, and since they're thought to embody the nature of their home plane, does it not make sense that they may well be wholly irredeemable (at least insofar as we celestials are concerned)?

Most of the bloods who have studied the yugoloths assume this to be the case. And in the end, it's probably the safest assumption for any right-thinking person.

BODILY FORM AND FUNCTIONS ♦

Enkillo the Sly

Long ago, when the green berks of the Prime Material Plane first laid eyes on the yugoloths, they figured the fiends had to be the result of some kind of bizarre adaptations, mutations, or cross-breeding. Why? Simple: Creatures couldn't look that weird naturally.

No wonder primates called Clueless, eh? In my day, we called 'em worse names than *that*, let me tell you! And now we know today that yugoloths are flesh-and-blood planar beings, which means that they mate, eat, and sleep just like anything else does. Well, maybe not *just* like anything else; read on.

GENDER

The whole idea of gender just ain't as important to the yugoloths as it is to, say, the baatezu and tanar'ri. Now, the lawful fiends usually lock themselves into one sex or the other (though they can change from station to station), and the chaotic ones switch genders whenever they please. But the yugoloths are both genders

at the same time — they're hermaphroditic. Each 'loth is capable of either siring or bearing young.



What ol' Enkillo means is that a yugoloth's gender really depends on its current situation. What's more, it may change at a moment's notice, because the only real change taking place is one of perception. When two 'loths mate, the fiend who fathers the offspring is considered the male, and the fiend who carries 'em is marked as the female.

"Course, anytime a yugoloth doesn't care to identify with a particular gender, it can still position itself as neuter. Strictly speaking, I guess a body could say the 'loths are neuter all the time — or that they're everything all the time. It's just a matter of how the fiends're viewed.

BIRTH

All yugoloths can breed. That might be due to the fact that they can't replenish their race with petitioners like the baatezu and tanar'i can. Sure, every time a 'loth dies, another one's born from the energies of Gehenna or the Gray Waste, but that just keeps the population constant. To grow the race, the fiends've got to reproduce naturally.

Anytime two lesser yugoloths — of any variety — mate, the end result is a mezzoloth, the lowest-ranking fiend of the race. Whichever parent takes the female role gives birth, though the mezzoloth doesn't come out full-grown — it's a young 'loth, and it must be raised to adulthood before it can begin advancing through the ranks of the race.

When greater yugoloths mate, they naturally produce greater offspring. But they can breed only with others of their own rank — a body'll never catch an ultraloth mating with an arcanaloth, for example. And the same rule applies to promotion; a stripling's got to reach its prime before it can try to advance.

A pairing of nycaloths always produces a litter of young nycaloths, which're forced by their parents to fight to the death to see which one earns the right to grow to adulthood.

Likewise, arcanaloths create nothing but more of their own kind. The young're raised with grace and care and taught the ins and outs of negotiation, but lessons are no substitute for experience — these arcanaloths aren't as skilled as the fiends who reach the rank by earning promotions from below. Those born into the rank serve mostly as scribes in the Tower of the Arcanaloths.

Finally, ultraloths can give birth all on their own, without having to mate. But their offspring are always young arcanaloths, who, like the young of arcanaloth parents, end up filling more mundane roles in the 'loth hierarchy. Why don't ultraloths produce ultraloths? Sages think it's because their state of existence is pure status, pure reward — a fiend's really got to work its head off in order to reach the top of the chain. It can't just be born there.

Truth to tell, the yugoloths'd like to impose that rule across the board. See, the leaders of the race discourage mating. Sure, it increases the number of 'loths in the multiverse, but the high-ups don't want to fill the ranks with inexperienced fiends. They only want the best and the

brightest in positions of power. And the only way to get that is through centuries of striving and promotion.

NOURISHMENT

Most folks call yugoloths carnivores and let it sit at that. But that ain't the whole story, and it's an oversimplification to just say that they eat meat. First off, 'loths relish in the taking of life. Meat is more than food for them; eating it's a symbolic gesture of contempt toward the rest of the multiverse. See, yugoloths consider themselves to be at the top of any food chain, and they want every berk in existence to know of their arrogance.

The freshness of the meat — and the way in which its owner got put in the dead-book — are other important factors in a yugoloth's diet. Sure, they can survive by eating old meat, even the flesh of a barfaur that's been lying dead in a desert for weeks, but they really prefer the meat of a living, thinking creature. The lesser 'loths, especially, love the flesh of a berk that's quaking in terror. Chant is the fear taints the flesh with just the right amount of angst and despair — flavorings that're an essential part of yugoloth fare. But anger's supposed to lend a kick all its own, and the other dark emotions each produce their own unique tastes (or so it's said, not having tried it myself).

The greater yugoloths don't care as much about emotional flavorings, and some aren't even particular about the quality of the meat at all. Nycaloths lean toward rotted flesh, savoring the extra decay and all that it symbolizes. Arcanaloths devour marrow, partly in a gesture of disdain and partly to show their place in the multiverse as fiends that drain life from the inside out. And ultraloths — well, they chew up the *all* of their victims. They take pain and love, glee and anger. It's a good thing the powers watch over their petitioners, or else the ultraloths'd devour every berk they came across, body and soul.

REST AND RECOVERY

If there's one thing ol' Enkillo's learned in all his years of planewalking, it's this: Even the mightiest bashers've got to sleep sometime, or at least lock themselves away for a period of replenishment. It's said that without enough rest, a body'll go mad — chant is that's what happened to the tanar'i — and the yugoloths're too canny to fall to that fate.

The lowest orders, the infantry-types, sleep just like most mortal bashers; they lay their bodies out on some handy surface and just shut down. These 'loths require about three hours of rest for every 21 hours they're awake. They're light sleepers, powers know, and they can snatch themselves awake at a moment's notice — a survival skill they've probably picked up from having to jump every time their high-ups start barking orders.

The most elite lesser yugoloths, the yagnoloths and maraenoloths, bury themselves once every three days in whatever type of ground they happen to be standing on. They ac-

tually immerse themselves in the soil (or wood or water or whatever) of the plane and let it refresh 'em for about five hours straight. Then they rise up again, ready to resume their duties. Me, I think they only do it because that's what they see their high-ups doing. 'Course, the yagnoloths and marnaoloths don't seem to understand the point of the process; they're just like children aping the actions of their parents.

See, the nycaloths and arcanaloths actually *meld* into the essence of the plane. They don't just wriggle down into the dirt or sink into a river; they let that soil or water get into *them*, too. They merge with their chosen element and draw life-giving power directly from the plane. It's also a great way to keep in touch with the mood of the plane, to see where it's falling away and where it's growing. The fiends do this for nine hours every nine days.

The ultroloths, on the other hand, simply fade from sight for a while. Some folks think they go to commune with the baernaloths. Some say they disperse themselves (or focus themselves so tightly that it amounts to the same thing) into the realm of metaphysical reality and waft on currents of power through the Lower Planes. 'Course, the ultroloths might just hole up in one of the towers of yugoloth lore, places where they know they'll be protected from all dangers but treachery. Whatever the truth, the ultroloths don't seem to need as much rest as the other 'loths; they're gone for just one day every decade.

◆ POWERS ◆

Mowatt Ke'Mahn

In combat, the yugoloths are formidable foes indeed. Take it from me; I've led my packs on many invasions of Gehenna and the Gray Waste. All seem to have an impressive array of powers they can wield at will, powers that mortals can duplicate only with magic. Yugoloths can change their features, raise the dead, infect a foe with a crippling illness, turn a foe into a friend, create potent illusions out of thin air, draw fire from that same air, and relocate themselves in the space of a heartbeat.

Like other fiends, most yugoloths also have the ability to *gate* in their comrades. (I say "most," dear Reader, because yagnoloths are too widely hated by the other members of their race to *gate* in allies for a fight.) However, most yugoloths take poorly to this sort of peremptory summoning, and if the gated fiend is as powerful as the one who summoned it, chances are fairly good that a struggle will ensue. Natu-

rally, ultroloths need never fear such an unpleasant surprise; when they *gate* in a yugoloth, the summoned fiend knows that it had better obey.

DISPOSING ♦ OF A YUGOLOTH ♦ *The Unnamed*

Mortals everywhere should thank their gods that, despite all of their much-vaunted powers, the yugoloths have their weaknesses. The most effective weapon against the yugoloths is an application of cold, magical or otherwise; this inflicts twice the damage one would expect it to cause. There are two exceptions: First, mezzoloths, for some odd reason,

take only normal damage from cold-based attacks; perhaps the yugoloths found some way to improve the resistance of their rank-and-file soldiers. And second, ultroloths take no damage from nonmagical cold; they're made of sterner stuff.

If a cold-based attack is impossible, the next best offense is a dose of magical electricity, which inflicts full damage on all yugoloths. Ordin-

nary electricity is nearly as good, though be warned that ultroloths are, again, immune. Finally, if neither cold nor electricity are available, try using magical or ordinary gas against a yugoloth foe. Alas — and by now this should be expected — the nonmagical variety will do no harm to an ultroloth.

Do not attempt to defeat a yugoloth — *any* yugoloth — by attacking it with acid, fire, or poison, which have no effect whatsoever (except, perhaps, to amuse the fiend). When it comes to weapons, remember that a blade of cold-wrought iron works no better against a yugoloth than a blade made of any other substance. However, silver or magical weapons can cut deep into 'loth flesh.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that you confront and slay a yugoloth by virtue of your wits and one of the above methods. Do not celebrate; the fiend may not be entirely dead. If it is a lesser yugoloth, you can be reasonably certain that you have killed it (unless it is playing dead in order to lure you closer, or it can use magical means to revivify itself). But most greater yugoloths can be slain only when on the Lower Planes of Carceri, Gehenna, or the Gray Waste. If a greater yugoloth "dies" on any other plane, it reforms back on the plane on which it was born, taking ten to thirteen years to reshape its physical form from the energies of the land. It is not known whether greater yugoloths are

dangerous or even sentient during this time, but once whole, they remember the faces of their killers and take pains to avenge themselves.

Beyond these general rules, two kinds of yugoloths have special abilities regarding death. First of all, an arcanaloth can be completely destroyed *only* if killed on Gehenna — neither Carceri nor the Gray Waste will do. And when an arcanaloth is slain on Gehenna, its accumulated knowledge wings its way to the Tower of the Arcanaloths and is absorbed into the racial memory of all yugoloths of that rank.

The other special case is the much weaker dergholoth. For some reason, it — alone among all the lesser yugoloths — has the ability to regain its form within a few days of its death, as long as that death occurs *outside* of the Lower Planes. Not even the ultroloths can do the same. This might be related to the mezzoloths' increased resistance to cold; as the bulk of the yugoloth armies, dergholoths and mezzoloths might have evolved the powers they needed to remain alive and battle-ready.

And yet, even when a sturdy mortal manages to kill a yugoloth and know in his heart that it will not rise again, the victory is a hollow one. The yugoloths do not fear death, because it is said that there is always a set number of 'loths in existence at any one time — that, like the modrons, when one dies, another rises to take its place. This may be propaganda spread by the yugoloths themselves to dishearten their foes, but it seems reasonable. Yugoloths are pure evil, and the amount of evil rarely decreases in the multiverse.

◆ DEALING WITH MORTALS ◆

Enkillo the Sly

Thinking about hiring on with a 'loth mercenary company, or maybe offering to sell one some chant on the Blood War, or even calling one up from Gehenna and forcing it to do some of your dirty work? Well, here's a tip, berk: Remember that the baatezu and tanar'i — two of the most vile, dangerous, and experienced races on the planes — are like clay in the hands of the yugoloths, molded and shaped as needed. Imagine how much trouble a 'loth'd have pulling *your* strings, a puny mortal who ain't even been alive as long as it takes to fight a minor Blood War skirmish.

The best way to deal with the yugoloths is to keep out of their knowledge. See, the 'loths think killing mortals is a waste of resources. They'd much rather peel the sods into carrying out their dark plans *for* them. That way, if the truth of a scheme ever comes to light, the mortals're likely to take the blame. And even though plenty of folks know how sneaky the yugoloths are, they *still* fall for the fiendish tricks more often than not. It seems that 'loths just have an uncanny knack for appealing to a mortal's greed, ego, sense of self-preservation, and the like — you name it, they'll take advantage of it.



SUMMONING YUGOLOTHS

Look, youngsters, it's never safe to summon a fiend. No matter what anyone else says, the darkness of a lower-planar monster can overwhelm a berk without a second thought if he's not careful. And even care ain't enough, most times, to keep a mortal summoner from falling into the grasp of whatever fiend he calls. It's a dangerous business, and no one in their right mind'd try it. Those who do are desperate, addle-coved, or greedy for power — or maybe all three. For folks with brain-boxes in their heads, summoning a fiend is the worst kind of last resort. Most bloods'd rather die.

There. That's my spel to discourage all you mortal spellslingers out there from trying to summon a yugoloth. Did it work? Did anyone put this book down? Did anyone say, "You know, ol' Enkillo's right on the mark, he is — I figure I'll go do something safer, like tease the Lady of Pain?"

Did'n't think so. Well, then, read on, but remember one thing: I tried. When your head gets ripped off and handed to you, don't come crying to me, berk.

Let's start with the basics: names. If a body doesn't work the true name of a specific yugoloth into his summoning spell — if he just blindly calls a 'loth, *any* 'loth, from the Lower Planes — he'll end up with a canoloth or a guardian yugoloth. That's what those creatures were made for: to answer all the general summonings so the *real* yugoloths wouldn't have to bother. Oh, they arrive with all the stink and smoke of any hydroloth, but they're second-stringers at best.

Fact is, guardian yugoloths can't even do anything but guard; they can't perform the kinds of services that summoners these days seem to want. And since they're nothing but 'loth constructions, guardians perish forever when slain. Bound to their masters in exchange for services offered or promised, guardians have about as much free will as golems. They can be smart; they're just not independent. When they're not under orders, they're motionless, locked away in the secret cellars of the Wasting Tower.

The guardians're special cases, actually. It takes power to command one of these fiends. That's no problem for a regular yugoloth, but any mortal berk who brings one to the Prime'd better be prepared to back up his entreaties with a show of strength. This is one case where the yugoloths brook no argument or bluff. If the caster hasn't tumbled to certain mysteries of the multiverse beyond a certain point, the guardian yugoloth might just kill him outright.

Now then, we were talking about names. If a mortal wants to pull something better than a canoloth or guardian, where does he get the true name he needs to do it? Well, there's always a chance he could buy the dark off the baatezu or steal it from the tanar'i — assuming that those fiends even *know* any true 'loth names. And it's possible he could track down a blood who's called a higher 'loth before (and lived to tell about it) and use that same name over again — but, powers alive, that yugoloth'll be sodding furious to be called away from home twice in the same short time span (short for the 'loth, anyway).

No, the best bet for true names is *The Book of Keeping*, a rare tome that identifies a good number of the 'loths in existence and gives tips on calling and binding them. Some folks say the book's just a myth, but ol' Enkillo's seen a copy with his own two eyes; I even got to flip through a few pages before fleeing for my life from its owner (a story for another time). Chant is that ten copies of the book exist in all the multiverse, which is an increase of six over the last time anyone checked. (Do you suppose the bean-counters were wrong before, or is some blood with a vendetta against the 'loths making new copies?)

'Course, some of the 'loths mentioned in *The Book of Keeping* have no doubt been put in another book by now — the dead-book — and replaced with new fiends whose names aren't yet public knowledge. But if a yugoloth's still alive and kicking on the Lower Planes, *The Book of Keeping*'ll give the best details on summoning and binding it. Naturally, unless he wants to hide his existence away for the rest of his miserable life, a basher'd better take care to compensate the fiend handsomely for its trouble. Yugoloths — especially the greater types that most herks can't seem to resist calling — are no creatures to irritate, and the fiends definitely consider summoning an irritation.

◆ LANGUAGE ◆ *The Unnamed*

The yugoloth language is a complex one, reminding one both of the stench of decaying roses and the whisper of wind blowing across the sand. Though they can communicate with one another — and with many other creatures — by an innate sort of telepathy, yugoloths also can speak directly if they so desire. And when dealing with non-yugoloths, they generally choose to speak to be sure to convey exactly the message they intend. Arcana-loths, especially, rely on speech in their negotiations with baatez and tanar'ri for the sale of yugoloth mercenaries.

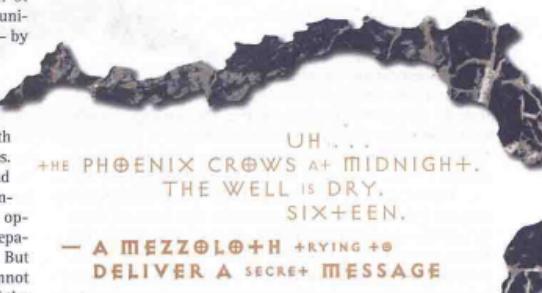
But whereas most races use the spoken word to send simple messages and prefer to deliver sensitive or complex information telepathically, the yugoloths take the opposite approach. After all, a conversation held with telepathy can be overheard by any fool with the right magic. But even a sage who eavesdrops on a spoken exchange cannot uncover meanings hidden deep below the surface of the sounds. Nearly every word in the yugoloth language carries two or more meanings, and thus when a 'loth speaks, it delivers at least two messages by its phrasing.

Not all yugoloths are highly practiced in this matter. Small-brained fiends like the mezzoloths and dergholoths have little command over the language; they try to communicate hidden meanings but usually end up obscuring *all* understanding. (It is quite amusing to observe.) But do not assume that two yagnoloths in Sigil who speak of a merchant's wares are doing anything of the sort. Their real conversation no doubt takes place in the subtle shadings of word choice and inflection.

Nor should you expect that the yugoloth language follows the divisions of rank. The ultraloth and the piscoloth do not speak different tongues. However, it may seem so to the casual observer, because the fiends' language grows more complicated as its speaker evolves. No mortal known to history has ever mastered the speech beyond the level of nycaloth. None ever will. The labyrinth of meaning and subtlety grows too dark to navigate; it is said that even the balors and pit fiends cannot unravel the secret tongue of the ultraloths. In some quarters, legend has it that a blood who *does* manage to master the language becomes a yugoloth himself — the corruption of the speech is so absolute that no one can use it without tainting his soul.

◆ CULTURE AND SOCIETY ◆ *Mowatt Ke'Mahn*

As one might expect, the yugoloths have a highly advanced society, one developed toward the pursuit and purity of evil. They have created a system that focuses the innate wickedness of their race and encourages a cold and straightforward march toward the realization of their master plan. Some say that the yugoloth culture seems as though the entire race were evolving toward one organism. Others dismiss that notion as childish nonsense, viewing the society as a collection of individuals working together. Regardless of which side is correct, dear Reader, I now present some of the more fascinating facets of that culture.



ESSENTIAL BELIEFS

Here is the most important secret to understanding yugoloth society: Their culture rests on the basis of the bluff. The fiends believe in manipulation and the skillful twisting of words and deeds to achieve their goals. Why, their entire hierarchy teaches them the importance of controlling the action from behind the scenes, of establishing dominance by blanketing pawns with a silken web rather than pummeling them with brute force. Several varieties of yugoloth are weaker than their inferiors

in sheer strength, so the high-ups must somehow *convince* their subordinates of their power and the might of the hierarchy above them. By doing so, they learn to bring the force of the whole race to bear to suppress threats and make themselves seem ever greater.

Of course, there are degrees of bluff. Dear me, it can't *all* be lies; otherwise, the whole system would crash to the ground the first time one fiend decided to put its superior's bluster to the test. Yugoloths prefer to have the upper hand at all times (unless they put themselves in the appearance of submission, only to strike again later); they know they need to back up their bluff on the odd chance that it's actually called. They prefer to do so with words, proffering greater and greater threat until their foil either gives in or shows signs of resorting to more physical methods of debate. And if it comes to that, the yugoloths like to be ready. Over the years, they've accumulated a wealth of power, and they've no compunctions about using it if they have to.

Ah, that leads me nicely into my next topic: the lack of feeling among the fiends. The yugoloths evolve toward no emotion, dear Reader; their purity in evil moves beyond the extremes of love and hate and into the gray wastelands of dispassion. The ultroloths best exemplify this progress. Those who must take their orders from the Oinoloth don't feel anger or jealousy — merely a driving ambition to seize the throne for themselves.

That's not to say the yugoloths don't *understand* emotion; on their way up through the ranks, they learn all about it, but they also learn how to cast it out of their bodies. The fiends are coldly dispassionate, logical and intuitive to the extreme; they're said to see all with crystal clarity. The yugoloths use emotion as they do any other tool — to manipulate others. Having fully purged the strains of law and chaos from their spirits (or so they claim), they're just not gripped by the primal drives of pride, hatred, or greed. They certainly don't want to wind up like the tanar'ri and baatezu, who've taken these dark emotions to ridiculous extremes.

Unfortunately, shedding passions is not as easy — or as permanent — as flaying skin. The heinous actions of one yugoloth can actually drive another backward in its emotional evolution. The stories I've heard of Anthraxus (poor, deposed Anthraxus!) seem to indicate that he has truly learned to hate the clever rival who, without so much as lifting a finger in battle, drove him from the Siege Malicious.

And though my past dealings with arcanaloths have shown them to be utterly without feeling, several colleagues on Elysium have boasted of how they managed to dig into an arcanaloth's core and unleash the deeply veiled emotions within — the better to vanquish the fiend. I'd hazard a guess that the ultroloths manipulate the veiled passions of the arcanaloths in order to keep them under control, and so on down the yugoloth ladder.

My, but don't the fiends live in a dangerous world? They espouse the force of evil, and so they must live with it on a daily basis. If the yugoloths truly seek to bring strength to the multiverse, the only way to do it is to make themselves constantly sharp, constantly aware — and the best way to do *that* is to make sure that they never trust a soul. The yugoloths move toward a realization of no emotion, no honor, and no trust. And yet they must work together, since they're building for the good of the multiverse. Or rather, for the evil.

POLITICS AND CASTE

One could say that life as defined by the yugoloths is one of caste, much like that of the baatezu (though neither race appreciates the comparison). The

greater rule the lesser through might, magic, and force of will. The inferiors steer clear of their superiors when they can,

they rarely rise up against the oppressors — unless they can get away with it. Mutiny is tolerated at the lower ends of the scale; those higher up should know better. To make matters worse, there's no telling when an especially harsh superior has been installed simply to test the loyalty of the lower ranks, and any fiend higher than a piscoloth remains alert for that possibility. Thus, the very existence of the yugoloths, dear Reader, is one great test.

A distinct chain of command runs from the ultroloths down to the mezzoloths, but within each rank, all fiends are more or less equal. One dergholoth or hydroloth is as good as any other — at least, until a fiend proves itself special enough to merit a promotion to the next rank. And thus the yugoloths struggle to prove themselves worthy of notice, certain that their situation will improve as soon as they ascend. Of course, they progress only from being one mezzoloth among many to one dergholoth among many to one piscoloth among many. . . . This pattern of proving oneself special and then rejoining the masses repeats itself with greater and greater complexity as the 'loths grow progressively more powerful.

As you might expect, the scheming for advancement is much more subtle than even that of the baatezu. Yugoloths



IF I WERE YOU, BERK,
I'D JUST END IT NOW.
THE YUGOLOTHS CAN
REACH YOU ANYWHERE.

— RAVAL VALSEIR,
SPY FOR THE YUGOLOTHS,
COUNSELING
MONTEIRUS CHEIRIF,
ON THE RUN FROM
+ THE FIENDS



prefer to keep their politics on a mental and verbal level. Occasionally, though, it degenerates into physical or magical brawling, and then all hidden factions stand revealed. When two 'loths decide to settle matters with combat, they bring their subordinates and allies along for the ride, and what might have been a simple duel turns into a free-for-all with various cabals struggling for domination. When the fight ends, the factions realign, and only the canniest of the yugoloths knows who's really on which side.

All of this political squabbling fails before the true leaders of the race: the Oinoloth and the General of Gehenna. The Oinoloth — the fiend that rules from the Wasting Tower — is said to guide the race and unify the warring factions, to present a determined yugoloth face to the outside world. Believe me, I don't envy the Oinoloth its job. How can the blood accomplish anything worthwhile when it must constantly defend against real and imagined plots against its position? Among the lupinals, we have a theory that Oinoloths are *glad* to give up the throne to new leaders, to free themselves from the chains of rulership. Dear me, the creatures can guide their race more fully by their absence than they ever did by their presence.

Now, the General of Gehenna is said to be many things. The first and strongest ultroloth. A returned baernaloth. The leader of the yugoloth race. The keeper of all fiendish knowledge. A symbol to be revered and respected. The most fearsome creature in the multiverse. A god-slayer. Whatever the truth of the General, it exerts a powerful pull on the hearts and minds of the yugoloths — and especially the newest ultroloths. Just as some say the ultroloths conspire to create the fiction of the baernaloths, others believe the Oinoloth sees to it that the legend of the General lives on. When the Oinoloth issues a decree from the General, all the factions listen. The myth and reputation alone of the General are enough to unite all yugoloths under a common goal. The fiends know (or do they simply believe?) that not even the Oinoloth would dare to lie about such a thing.

Among the 'loths, that sort of respect is truly power.

MANIPULATION

Discuss all the schemes hatched by the yugoloths over the eons? Dear me, our mysterious editor has not granted me the space to detail those we've uncovered (or suspected) in the past year alone! The neutral evil fiends have been involved in so much string-pulling and shadow-ruling throughout history that I daresay it'd be easier to list all the events they *didn't* have a hand in. And even then, I'm sure that someone, somewhere, would stand up and swear that the 'loths were behind those occurrences, as well. How could we prove it conclusively one way or the other? The canny fiends cover their tracks too well. (If you must have an example of this cunning, refer to "The Dark," earlier in this chapter.)

I'm always amused when a mortal mercenary in my employ tells me that he's seen through a particular yugoloth's plans. The poor bashers have such a hard time un-

derstanding that they see only what the fiends *let* them see in order to mislead them from the *true* plot. (Of course, mortal egos rarely allow them to believe that they've been duped so easily.) The yugoloths play games of plots within plots, mazes within mazes, spinning webs of such complexity — and, at the same time, breathtaking simplicity — that few cutters ever have a chance at unravelling them all. Only those with vastly cynical attitudes and the time (and expense) to devote to understanding yugoloth motives might ever come close, and that, really, rules out just about everyone but the fiends' fellow immortals.

The yugoloths simply view every being that walks the planes as a pawn in a greater match. They don't respect anyone's feelings or fate — and why should they, since the multiverse is their plaything? Dear Reader, the 'loths don't even spare one another from this attitude. Each thinks that *it* is running the ultimate game, that even though other yugoloths can see the pieces on the board, they're still just pawns in a greater contest. Yugoloths use and manipulate one another almost as much as they do everyone else.

How do they become so devious, so callous? Imagine, dear Reader, that your closest friend, the being you trust most in the entire world, is suddenly revealed to have been molding you to his needs and goals all along. How do you react? With shock and dismay, certainly, with self-loathing for letting yourself be fooled. And you resolve not to make the same mistake with the *next* being you choose to befriend . . . but it happens again. And again. Over and over, until you become untrusting, using others to see if they have the integrity to treat you as you deserve. By then, of course, you can clearly see how much smarter you are than everyone else, how you can manipulate others to *your* ends — and then you discover, once again, that you've been molded.

The evolution continues. Though you see the pattern — indeed, though you set the pattern all around you — you come to realize that there's something greater. You feel no passion for your inferiors; they can be — should be — nothing but your unwitting pawns. Now you look to control the thing that controls you.

So it is with the yugoloths.

◆ IN SUMMARY ◆ *The Unnamed*

Fear the baatezu: They are cold and cunning disciplinarians. Fear the tanar'ri: They are brutal, bloodthirsty killers. But most of all, fear the yugoloths: They are masks of mystery, and no matter how many layers of skin you peel away, you will never know how many still lie between you and the *true* face. Spawned on the Gray Waste (the very heart of evil) and nourished on Gehenna (the very forge of unforgiving brutality), the yugoloth race is notorious for the ill ends to which it applies its manipulative genius.

Pray that their plans — whatever they may be — never come to fruition.

THE TOWER OF INCARNATE PAIN

(Site)

HEARSAY. Somewhere on one of the Lower Planes, the yugoloths are constructing a hidden tower that'll form a perfect planar triangle with two other 'loth spires: Khin-Oin (on the Gray Waste) and the Tower of the Arcanaloths (on Gehenna). This new tower, which is nearly finished, is the fiends' greatest secret and will also be their greatest source of power — a place where yugoloths can scheme against the multiverse unhindered. Its completion will give them domination over the planes and spell the triumph of evil. What's more, any mortal who enters the tower will be transfigured into a shape more suited to serving his new yugoloth masters.

DESCRIPTION. Though most chant about what the yugoloths're up to is dead wrong (mainly because it's usually disinformation spread by the 'loths themselves), word about the new tower is actually half-right. For the past several millennia, the fiends've been growing the structure in Othrys, the first layer of Carceri. The new spire — called the Tower of Incarnate Pain — will allow the yugoloths to focus their energies across the Lower Planes of Conflict (namely, Gehenna, the Gray Waste, and Carceri).

Where the Wasting Tower is the spine of a dead god and the Tower of the Arcanaloths is an obsidian spire, the Tower of Incarnate Pain is the perfection of agony made corporeal. The tower's formed of the living bodies of petitioners magically bound together in an obscene mish-mash of flesh. Fact is, the tower's planned to be a living creature on its own, able to move or bury itself into the ground. 'Course, the tower'll never leave Carceri (not that it could, anyway); in order to maximize their power, the 'loths need to keep one spire on each of the three middle Lower Planes.

The tower's only about one-third finished (though chant-brokers find it more dramatic to warn that it'll be done any day now). The walls still bleed with pain, and the agonies of its mortar scream to the skies. When completed, the Tower of Incarnate Pain will stand over 20 miles high and three miles through. It'll replace the Wasting Tower as the supreme architectural creation of the yugoloths.

HISTORY. If the builders had been allowed to work in peace, the tower would've been finished long ago. Unfortunately (for the fiends, that is), the fact that the project's set on Carceri means that they've got to deal with the gehreleths, and, as any berk knows, the 'leths hate the yugoloths something fierce. On four separate occasions, the architects had nearly completed the tower, only to have a marauding army of farastu, kelubar, and shator storm in and tear the thing to still-screaming pieces.

'Course, since the gehreleths number just shy of twenty thousand at the best of times, the yugoloths could simply fill Othrys with fifty thousand 'loths to guard against the van-

dalsim. But the neutral evil fiends want to keep the whole thing quiet, so they don't dare move such a large force. What's more, chant among the 'loth leaders has it that Apombs, the bitter god of the gehreleths, lends divine aid to its creations, eager to ruin all yugoloth plans. That worries the commanders; they have no deity on *their* side.

SPECIAL FEATURES. The Tower of Incarnate Pain does not yet have any special features for the yugoloths. However, it does have the ability to absorb any nonyugoloth foolish enough to walk inside the structure. The tower takes their bodies for its bricks and their spirits for the Reflective Chasm (see below).

Apparently, the use of living beings in the construction is more than just fiendish malevolence. Chant is that the true purpose of the tower is to launch an experiment in sentience, that the yugoloths hope to end up with a new (and utterly loyal) creature that will codify their race and bring wicked enlightenment to the multiverse.

THE REFLECTIVE CHASM. Below the "scaffolding" of the Tower of Incarnate Pain lies a gash in the earth, a deep pit that drops for miles straight down. That's where the tower will come to rest when completed; the chasm even moves as the spire moves so as to remain always underneath. The sides of the pit are lined with darkly glimmering obsidian, which reflects back in a thousand different ways any light brought near it. Now and again, purple lightning arcs up from the chasm, shooting jaggedly into the roiling clouds above the tower.

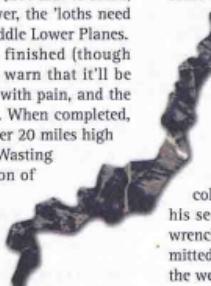
A berk who approaches the edge of the pit and gazes in may well be fascinated by the subtle play of colors — deep blues and angry reds clash and collide in the midst of the chasm, seeming to war for dominance. If a sod looks on these radiant hues too long, though, he'll see more than he

ever expected. The colors, while beautiful in a savage way, leech from onlookers whatever dark memories and emotions they thought they'd locked down deep (or, in the words of an ancient blood, "...the abyss looks also into thee").

One to six minutes after a berk first starts watching the colors, they'll merge peacefully into a sickening hue and begin to rise. At that point, a perfect double of the viewer appears in the congealing colors and tries to overwhelm him with its knowledge of his secret weaknesses. A paladin, for example, feels gut-wrenching remorse for any unworthy acts he may have committed in the past. A fiend, on the other hand, suffers from the weakness of a mercy allowed or a virtue left unsoled.

Either way, the unlucky sod's got one chance, and one chance only, to resist the pull of the Reflective Chasm. If he is well and truly wise, he can scramble to safety. (If he ever returns to the chasm, though, his reflection will still be there, waiting for him.) But a berk who fails the test feels an inexorable pull from the pit, and no force on the planes can stop him from hurling himself in, where he joins the tortured chorus of wails in the dancing lightning.

In other words, if he succeeds at a Wisdom check at -4.



THE TOWER OF INCARNATE PAIN

Notes:

Central shaft burrows deep underground - make sure final shaft is in solid foundation
River is drawn from the Medicine Khan
Sealing and skin of a dead person -
Earth? Ashes? Dust?
Metal angles of shaft very
important for channeling power
Burrows and living spaces
scattered along path to
to maximize morale of group.
Crown of Agony focuses vision
on the and connects them
Khin-Oin and Govee at
Arenatotha,
creating network of
power across the
Lower Planes.

To Do:

Set up acquisition and training
of power's skin.
Allow for maximized use of
facility
Acquire 10 million new petitioners
for next phase of building.
Seat shahz in Reflective Chamber
Clear lists and notes with
ultraloth council.

Crown of Agony

Mid Spoke of
Wisdom

First Spoke of
Wisdom

Proposed height
20 miles

Timetable:

3 months, short-term goals, subject
to approval.

300 days: Acquire new
petitioners

1 year (and continuing thereafter)
Blow off qhizleth
lavacon

100 years: Complete initial
building stage

200 years: Complete secondary
stage

333 years: Complete final stage

499 years: Activate network

1000 years: Provide tour for
bestozu and have 't' to complete

thus lessening knowledge of this project
across the planes

The landscape of Carceri is one of the most treacherous known to the multiverse. Gorges crisscross their way across the plane, dooming any traveler whose footing is unwary, and miles-high mountain peaks shrug off their loads, showering boulders and hikers into the abysses below.

In those darkest canyons, where the tumbled scree of fallen rock lies, where the wind howls its loneliness and frustration, the corpses of the dead lie twisted, ready for the carrion-eaters to consume them. Most of these bodies are sheared away by the elements and the processes of decay, but a select few are condemned to a far more horrendous fate: They become gehreleths.

Infused with the will of their god and their creator, the baernaloth Apomps, the gehreleths are truly indestructible. They can be killed, as the baatezu and tanar'i know full well, but as soon as a gehreleth falls, another arises from the tangled remains of the dead, carrying the memories of the race and a terrible new purpose. Clutching their mysterious obsidian triangles, the gehreleths roam the dusty gorges and acidic seas of their home plane, seeking out new hatreds and new enemies with which to occupy their time.

Nobody really knows the purpose of the foul creatures. The best guess is that they were created to tear down and devour, for they seem to be fiends of random destruction and intense hatreds. They've got loyalties to each other that none can fathom, and an abhorrence for any being who's different.

It is said that the gehreleths are the summoning stock of the Lower Planes, that any means of summoning a random lower-planar being often brings a 'leth to the caller's door. It is said that this occurs because other races of the Lower Planes despise the gehreleths and have managed to ward themselves and shunt the random spells to these disgusting creatures. It is also said that the gehreleths come so frequently because it is their will to do so. But none of this is so; in fact, the opposite is true. The gehreleths number far fewer than the other fiends, and so they are caught by summonings far less often.

It's a wonder that the gehreleth race has survived to this day, caught as they are on Carceri, one of the battlefields of the Blood War, suffering from vicious assaults by both the baatezu and the tanar'i. But they haven't been wiped from the planes like a stain. They rise from the bodies of the dead, yes, but they are also powerful, clever, and dangerous — they thrive, after all, on one of the most bitter and inhospitable of the Outer Planes.

Much of gehreleth history and physiology remains a mystery to scholars, as the fiends have been remarkably cautious — for the most part — about preserving their secrets. Those who share the hidden knowledge are said to gain the enmity of the entire race, and a gehreleth bears a grudge to the bitter end and beyond. Those who contributed their research and lore to this portion of the book have passed on, written anonymously, or hidden themselves away.

As the compiler of this section, I alone took on the responsibility of constructing this chapter out of their scattered notes and ravings.

— Carlvian Everhaifte

THE GEHRELETHS

WITH CREATURES
LIKE THESE,
IT'S NO WONDER
APOMPS WAS EXILED.
— ICE THE THRICE-BORN

THE LEGEND

◆ OF APOMPS ◆

It's dark as to how long ago the gehreleths came into being. Word has it that they've been around at least as long as all the other fiendish races, and maybe longer, though the yugoloths would no doubt challenge such a claim. It is said that a mighty shator itself revealed the truth: The gehreleths once held sway over the entire Lower Planes, until they were reduced in number and imprisoned on Carceri by a cabal of evil deities who feared the fiends' power. It is said that a chant-broker haunted the Upper Planes for scraps of wisdom about the gehreleths, returning with a dilapidated tome (apparently bound in kelubar skin) that told a story of how the leths, once the handsomest nobles of Elysium, were disfigured and cast out by jealous archons and asuras. It is said that an Arcadian zoologist captured a larvae, locked it in a tank on Gehenna, and observed it. She later claimed that the thing, kept out of the hands of fiends and night hags, slowly evolved into the form of a farastu, and thus she concluded that the gehreleths must be the natural race of the Lower Planes, the intended kings of those blighted lands.

The tales are many as to why and how the gehreleths came about. But none of them take into account the fiends' obsession with their strange obsidian triangles, or their reverence for a godlike blood known as Apombs, or their intense hatred for yugoloths.

None of them, that is, except one.

This tale begins with Apombs, which is cast as being far more than the patron of the gehreleths – it is, in this telling, their father and creator. The baernaloths, the enigmatic creations of the primal force of Evil, counted Apombs among their number. While the other baernaloths argued about the best forms for the children they proposed to spread across the multiverse,

Apombs took action. Using the clay of the Lower

Planes as its model, Apombs breathed life

into the first creations of the baernaloths.

It shaped three varieties of these

new creatures, which it named

"gehreleths," and it presented

them to the assembled coun-

cil of baernaloths. It ex-

pected acclaim

and status

for its ini-

tiative and



achievement. Instead, it received only vile insults and curses, for whereas the baernaloths prized pure evil, Apomps had somehow created wicked beings of chaos.

Weeping with shame and anger, Apomps gathered its children and fled the council, vowing vengeance on those who had humiliated it and threatening retribution for its dishonor. After a long and terrible journey — during which its thirst for revenge grew into near-madness — Apomps came to rest at last on the plane of Carceri. The air was bitter; it promised anger. It was a good place to settle.

Far from the prying eyes of the other baernaloths, Apomps began to plot and plan the best way to destroy its arrogant brethren and their new creations, a race called the yugoloths. Few of the gehreleths had survived the trek to their new home, and so Apomps fashioned new ones, using the bodies of the native beasts of Carceri. Apomps siphoned its life force into the models it had created, at the same time channeling their perceptions back in upon itself. Finally, it bestowed upon them obsidian triangles, shapes of power from which they derived their history and inner strength. Thus was the current race of the gehreleths spawned.

No one knows if this story is any more true than the others. Interestingly, a variant legend says that the yugoloths were created first, and that the original gehreleths were just a failed attempt at mimicry. Whatever the real truth, the tale of Apomps is, at the very least, a convenient one. It explains so much about the gehreleths that most who study it consider it valid — or at least a working conjecture of how the creatures were formed. Thus, the rest of this chapter likewise treats the legend of Apomps as truth.

◆ PHYSIOLOGY ◆

The gehreleths have only three forms, far fewer than most fiend races. It is said that this is because Apomps couldn't afford to breathe out any more of its life without killing itself and therefore its creations. Others merely consider the gehreleths one of the purest examples of the multiversal Rule of Threes and take it to be more evidence that the 'leths are *meant* to rule the Lower Planes.

The three forms of the race — farastu, kelubar, and shator — are all created from the rotting corpses of Carceri, and they all retain some of the characteristics of the dead. Their skin is uniformly loose, as if it were decaying on their immortal forms, and there's a rank odor about them that smells of uncured skins hanging in the breeze. They are also extremely ugly creatures, even to other fiends.

THE TRIAD

The least of the gehreleths are the farastu, or "tarry 'leths," so named because their bodies secrete a black tar that sticks to foes and weapons. Farastu are tall, slim fiends with long heads and arms, and they're also tremendously strong and quick. They're not exactly stupid creatures (unless one considers the average human a stupid creature), but they are vi-

olently malicious. Farastu attack any nongehreleths they come across, for they have no fear of their own death. Stronger than ogres, farastu are still known as the lowest and weakest of the gehreleths. The fiends make up for this perceived frailty with their fearlessness in battle — it's both a compliment and a curse to be called "as brave as a farastu."

The middle gehreleths are the kelubar, or "slime 'leths," a nickname that refers to the glistening, acidic ooze shed by their skin. The stench of this slime is enough to drive a warrior to his knees, and anyone attacked by one of these creatures suffers additional damage from their natural acid. Kelubar are said to be a cross between the farastu and the shator. Thick fiends with wide, ebony-skinned bodies, they're even stronger than the farastu, able to wrestle prime-material giants with little difficulty. They are mad for magical items, figuring that such objects can help them gain further power among their race.

The nobility of the gehreleths, the shator are covered with loose wattles of flesh, making them look like they're draped in skins. This might be the source of their nickname, "shaggy 'leths," which is really a misnomer in that shator are hairless. These fiends are shorter than either of the other two varieties of gehreleth, but they're much heavier and are stronger than just about any kind of tanar'ri, baatezu, or yugoloth. Only the ultroloth and the yagnoloth are known to have greater strength. Shator are incredibly smart and extremely self-assured, projecting their confidence in their own power as a nearly visible air about them.

POPULATION COUNT

Unlike the other fiends, the gehreleths have been counted. Ancient reports of the project paint it as an incredibly painstaking, frustrating, and dangerous piece of work. How could a census-taker ever be certain that there wasn't one more farastu hiding in some unknown cave? How could two different researchers know that they hadn't accidentally both counted the same kelubar? And how does *anyone* know that the population remains the same to this day?

It is perhaps wise not to put much stock in the census. The Fraternity of Order can't even get an accurate count of the folks living in Sigil, and scouring the Cage is far easier than combing Carceri. Still, the official story is that only 9,999 gehreleths exist at any one time — 10,000, if Apomps is counted as a member of the race. These numbers are divided equally among the three types of gehreleth, with 3,333 in each rank. But such division is not particularly chaotic — more support for skepticism.

And yet, even this perhaps untrue count is not entirely certain. When the drums of the Blood War beat loud and armies of baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths pour through Carceri, the gehreleth population doubles from 9,999 to 19,998. This swelling doesn't take place overnight, but it does occur with unnatural speed, perhaps suggesting that these "extra" fiends are *always* around but merely hidden in secret lands, and perhaps suggesting divine intervention.

Yes, some believe that Apomps — recognizing the immediate danger to its children — nearly depletes all of its own personal energies by creating enough gehreleths to withstand the war. Once the bulk of the invaders have left Carceri, the 'leths — according to the story — quickly dwindle back down to 9,999 as Apomps reabsorbs its precious life force.

GENDER AND BIRTH

Gender is unknown among the gehreleths. The fiends don't couple for procreation or pleasure, and it's not that they simply choose not to — they can't do it at all. Gehreleths appear to be totally without the drive to create new life, existing only to destroy. When one is slain, a new farastu rises from a corpse somewhere on Carceri, the body remaking itself into the shape of a tarry 'leth. The process has nothing at all to do with petitioners.

Others claim to have spoken with various gehreleths that identified themselves as males or females, so unless the mortals were being peeled, it seems that some 'leths do assume genders at will. But inasmuch as they can't sire offspring or give birth, it makes little difference. In the end, all gehreleths are neuter.

REST AND NOURISHMENT

Gehreleths never seem to sleep. Infused with the restless power of their creator, they constantly roam, seeking new opportunities for destruction and havoc. Still, when the farastu and kelubar liquefy themselves (see "Powers," below), they might achieve some sort of replenishing rest. Shator remain wakeful throughout their existences but are largely sedentary, resting occasionally to gather their thoughts, though no study of a gehreleth has ever shown it to attain true sleep.

As for sustenance, all gehreleths seem to be pure carnivores — and eager ones, at that. They're always on the hunt for meat, and they appear to have nearly limitless appetites. Some scholars think 'leths eat all the time because it's the best way to destroy other fiends, but they may eat so much simply because they have little else to do; they certainly don't let the need for food overwhelm them. After all, gehreleths are fiends and presumably immortal. They can't starve to death.

POWERS

Though smaller in number, the gehreleths are, pound for pound, more powerful than almost any other race of fiends, which no doubt helps them to stay alive when the Blood War surges. A shator likely can defeat a pit fiend, balor, or ultroloth in straight-up battle, and even a farastu can give the higher baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths a run for their money.

This is due in part to the fact that they're blessed with special abilities that promote their natural talents. All gehreleths have a number of innate powers that duplicate the effects of mortal spells. Though some 'leths have further abilities, these are the powers common to all members of the race: sense the presence of good-aligned beings, sense the presence of creatures that try to hide invisibly, cause themselves to be so hidden, determine whether a place or object radiates magical power, do away with the effects of spells and other magic, read the minds of others, communicate verbally with foreign creatures, cause foes to flee in abject terror, summon other gehreleths to their aid, create banks of obscuring fog, and sap the strength of their enemies. The gehreleths can call upon some of these powers at will and some only a certain number of times per day.

Furthermore, both farastu and kelubar can liquefy themselves into pools of slimy ooze — and later reform their bodies — more or less at will, depending on outside forces at work. If a farastu pours itself into a bottle and then a shator pops in a cork, the liquefied fiend

won't be going anywhere until it's released. In fact, it's very likely that a shator has a number of such bottles in its lair so that it can open or shatter said containers and quickly command a brace of guards and defenders. Naturally, the transformation isn't immediate; the gehreleths take a few minutes to dissolve themselves, and they take about twice as long to reform.

MORALITY

Gehreleths seem to be a tad easier to dispose of than other fiends in that they don't share many of the immunities enjoyed by baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths — not that they're pushovers in any sense of the word.

All three kinds of gehreleths merely laugh at acid, poison, and weapons that aren't enchanted. Farastu, perhaps due to their tarry skins, don't burn or freeze as easily as they otherwise might, and so they suffer only half damage from flames and cold. Kelubar, their skin even better protected by acidic slime, feel no pain whatsoever from fire- or cold-based attacks. And while shator don't exude anything through their flesh, they don't suffer wounds from any kind of nonmagical attack. Even enchanted weapons aren't quite as effective against shator as they could be, perhaps because the fiends' hanging folds of skin deflect many blows and help to absorb the force of those that strike home.

When it comes to the matter of making sure a gehreleth is truly dead, again the fiends of Carceri follow less complex rules than their lower-planar brethren. In slaying a baatezu or tanar'ri, one must take into account all manner of factors — site of death, method of killing, type of fiend — in determining whether it might rise again on its home plane. In slaying a gehreleth, one can rest assured that he has truly and permanently ended its life.

Other Sources: Gehreleths

PLANESCAPE® MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Appendix
Farastu, kelubar, shator

Of course, one must also live with the knowledge that he has created a new menace in the process. If a farastu dies, another one instantly rises on Carceri to take its place. If a kelubar or shator dies, first lower gehreleths are promoted to fill the holes in the hierarchy, and then a new farastu is born from a Carcerian corpse. Unless the Red Prison were cleaned of every last dead body (an impossible task, all admit), the gehreleths have an inexhaustible supply of meat waiting to serve Apomps.

In the end, remember this: No matter how or where or why a gehreleth is killed, a new one forms immediately in the canyons of Carceri, complete with its obsidian triangle and ravenous appetite for destruction. Thus, no one can ever really say that he's killed a gehreleth.

◆ GEHRELETH SOCIETY ◆

Gehreleths are said to have no society, but that's only half true. The veracity of the statement comes from the fact that 'leths constantly perish and are replaced, and thus have no real identities to speak of. What's more, other than their obsidian triangles, which command quite a black-market price, the gehreleths produce no cultural material of any value. However, the reality is that they have evolved a society of a sort.

Of course, the society is extremely simple, one based on raw power. Inasmuch as the shator are the strongest, they rise to the top of the heap, and, as the nobility of the race, they enforce their whims ruthlessly. It is said that the shator draw from their obsidian triangles the images of the lesser 'leths, then command them accordingly. If that's the case, though, it's hardly ever seen. Despite their might, the shator appear to be creatures of whim, and they don't organize troops unless sorely pressed to do so.

The kelubar occupy the middle rank of the society, and they too bully the lowly farastu. Their main goal in life is to destroy any fiendish armies (especially yugoloth mercenary companies) that cross their paths, but they'll not hesitate to sharpen their skills on any mortals they come across.

The farastu are the least of the gehreleths, and they chafe under their lack of power. Though they're born with the instinctive knowledge of their purpose, they don't have the power to carry it out entirely, so they rage against any creature that's different from them. When a shator needs an army or a kelubar needs a distasteful job done, it calls the farastu forth, and so the tarry 'leths simmer in resentment.

Apomps, their deity, watches over all, perhaps from a hidden lair in the sixth layer of Carceri. It remains aloof from the day-to-day concerns of its creations, but when a gehreleth finds itself in dire need, it can somehow call upon the power inherent in its obsidian triangle to gain an audience with Apomps. No one knows if the gehreleth travels to its god, if Apomps comes to the fiend, or if the exchange occurs only in a dreamlike, spiritual sense. Naturally, a gehreleth knows to petition its god only as a last resort, for what prevents Apomps from simply letting the foolish fiend die? After all, another will take its place.

Oddly, gehreleths never fight amongst themselves. Perhaps they're so closely tied to one another that every blow struck against a gehreleth is felt by Apomps, and those struck by one gehreleth against another wound most deeply. The mad baernaloth forbids the infighting so common among the other fiendish races, and, as a result, gehreleths lash out only at other creatures, and they lash out hard.

PROMOTIONS

Promotion in gehreleth society is a matter of catch-as-catch-can. When one of them is destroyed, the most convenient gehreleth of lesser rank is promoted immediately, and so on down the line until a new farastu stirs from a corpse. It has nothing to do with merit proven or lessons learned; it's merely a matter of chance. It is not known whether Apomps — or some other force — pulls the strings of the process, or whether it is merely as natural as a caterpillar turning into a butterfly.

The farastu and kelubar believe the latter, but when a gehreleth reaches the rank of shator, it gains enough intelligence to theorize that it can, perhaps, leave the fleshly realm entirely and merge with its god, as do petitioners throughout the Outer Planes. Of course, the shator have no idea if they can distinguish themselves in any way, or if this final advancement is again a matter of chance. In any case, they might be wrong and face nothing but eternal oblivion when slain.

OBSIDIAN TRIANGLES

One thing unites the gehreleths: Each of them carries an obsidian triangle, said to have been granted by Apomps. This object is thought to be a link to Apomps itself, as well as a way for the fiends to draw power and knowledge from their collective racial memory. It is said that, on occasion, a gehreleth can draw strength from its triangle in order to strike enemies — such as balors and pit fiends — that normally are wounded only by magical weapons. With the triangles, the 'leths can level the playing field a bit.

Chant in some quarters says that the triangles also serve as eyes and ears for Apomps, which collects the impressions and thoughts of its minions. Thus it is that Apomps is said to be everywhere that a gehreleth is, to have insinuated its own being throughout the entire race. It is unclear whether Apomps controls its offspring or simply issues secret wisdom via the triangles and allows the gehreleths to do as they will. Most believe that Apomps infuses the 'leths with knowledge at the time of their creation, then sets them loose on an unsuspecting plane.

The triangles are difficult to study. The only way to obtain them is to kill their owners, and even then, it's suspected that the objects lose whatever dark potency they might once have had, leaving them valuable only as curios. A wily merchant or mercenary *might* be able to steal one from a still-living gehreleth, but the fiend and its brethren would then go to any length to retrieve it — and slay the

thief. Because of their rarity, there's a thriving market for triangles taken from live 'leths, not to mention for guarding the safety of a sage busy examining the dangerous object. No one's fully plumbed their secrets yet, but the thought of unlocking knowledge accumulated by the fiends over the span of eternity spurs on many a researcher.

If the triangles truly do all that is said of them, it's easy to see why gehreleths would want them returned.

But some scholars believe that the reasons go even deeper, that Apombs can peer only through triangles carried by its faithful offspring. Each stolen triangle is one fewer eye the baernaloth has across Carceri, and thus one step toward decreasing the power of the deity and its race. On the planes, that cannot be tolerated — especially among fiends.

SUMMONING A GEHRELETH

If a spellcaster knows the true name of a specific farastu, kelubar, or shator, he can use *ensnarement* or *gate* to try to summon the fiend to his plane. If the wizard uses *lesser calling* or another means to summon a fiend at random without knowing the creature's true name, he can bring only a farastu.

The farastu are particularly notorious for turning on the mortals who summon them. They hate to be ripped from Carceri and will kill their summoner or plot revenge against him for being forced into tasks not of their own choosing. Should one (accidentally or with malice aforethought) summon a farastu, he should banish it back to Carceri immediately. For even if one succeeds in binding and commanding the fiend, it will no doubt look to avenge itself on the entire world. It will try to establish a kingdom of cruelty and pain, spreading destruction across the land by enslaving all people to its will.

Kelubar summoned from Carceri aren't as murderous or bloodthirsty. They use their vast abilities not for havoc but to steal as many small magical trinkets as they can before they're banished. Kelubar have little or no interest in ravaging or dominating prime-material worlds and prefer to tear apart the wastes of their home plane, contributing to its bleak desolation.

The shator actually delight in being summoned. One of these fiends will try to turn the spellcaster's mind from all thoughts of banishment, then set itself up behind a mortal philosopher or artist. Using its powers, the shator induces visions of beautiful despair and grants a strange sort of poetry to its victim. The more appealing the presentation of the

LOOKING + BUY
A 'LETH'S + TRIANGLE, CUTTER?
YOU CAME + + THE
RIGHT PLACE.
I'VE GOT A WHOLE
+TRUNK FULL OF 'EM.
— "HONEST" GRADY,
A LOWER-PLANAR
MERCHANT IN SIGIL'S
MARKET WARD



puppet, the greater the pleasure of the fiend. Of course, once the shator grows weary of spreading malaise, it slays its tool and travels back to Carceri.

Don't summon a gehreleth. If one feels he must, he should make certain that he can get away with it.

The fiends remember their servitude — indeed, they may even pass the memories of that servitude on to the rest of the race through their obsidian triangles — and they exact a terrible vengeance for humiliation. Gehreleths don't grant power or favors to their summoners, and though they can be forced to perform services, it makes them seethe all the more. Let them be.

DEALING WITH MORTALS

Gehreleths don't deal with mortals unless the fiends feel like toying with them. They don't press mortals into service, pummel them to get information, trick them into carrying out dark schemes, or anything of the sort. They simply commit violence upon their victims in such a manner as to amuse themselves greatly. They are openly contemptuous of all other creatures and won't show deference to any being — even if they're about to be destroyed. Their knowledge of their race's immortality keeps them from fear or respect of any sort.

The fiends speak their own language, a harsh and gravely tongue, but they can use their magical abilities to communicate with any creature that crosses their path. Even when speaking other languages, 'leths sound guttural and raucous, full of the malevolence that only the urge for true destruction can bring. Generally, gehreleths talk to mortals only to taunt or anger them, or to instill in them the dread of impending doom.

♦ IN SUMMARY ♦

At once the simplest and most puzzling of all the fiends, the gehreleths seem to exist only to destroy — and to destroy yugoloths in particular. They are primal and instinctual, with little society or culture to speak of; even the poetically bent shator prefer to corrupt other cultures rather than create their own. Gehreleths are reviled by the baatezu and tanar'i for getting in the way of the Blood War (and, worse yet, refusing to fight on either side), and they're hated by the yugoloths for their deep-seated vendetta against that race.

Gehreleths are, in short, the most despised creatures in the multiverse, and they strike back accordingly. If one sees a 'leth while on his travels, his best bet is to hide until the creature has passed. Gehreleths aren't beasts that can be dealt with. They are agents of annihilation.

The fiends of the planes aren't limited to those described in the pages previous. Those're just the most common and the best known. Fact is, the Lower Planes are crawling with plenty of creatures that have the raw power of evil coursing through their veins. Some are considered fiends in their own right, while others have a simple touch of the fiendish about them.

See, some of the creatures native to the Lower Planes are just as wicked — and some just as intelligent — as any baatezu or gehreleth, without actually earning the title of "fiend." Among these are counted abrians, barghests, diakka, macephants, nightmares, retrievers, shadow-drakes, vargouilles, and so forth. These monsters're all native to one or more of the Lower Planes, but they're not considered real fiends. Why not? Some say it's because the yugoloths created the true fiendish races, or simply that the fiends all sprang from the same well — but the truth is very few bloods know what makes a fiend a fiend.

Back in the introduction to this book I took my own stab at solving that puzzle.

Well, my conclusions're supported by most folks who've done their own studies: Namely, that a fiend is an evil creature

formed from the essence of a petitioner or the raw material of the Lower Planes themselves. Sure, plenty of beasts that live on Acheron or the Gray Waste or Pandemonium are touched by the essence of their home planes, but it's also a fact that most of them aren't shaped by their plane, altered by the power of belief, and infused with a terrible purpose. They might take on some dark purpose themselves, and they might be feared in the councils of their lands, but they can't rightly be called fiends.

This final chapter describes the most prominent lower-planar creatures that haven't already been covered in this book. No doubt plenty of berks'll hoot and howl because I left out their favorites, and to them I say: tough. You want to learn more about vargouilles? Go poke through some caves on Carceri — you'll learn plenty, and that right quick. But here's what I've got for you:

- ◆ Bodaks — mortals corrupted and deformed by the evils of the Abyss.
- ◆ Hordlings — the rootless, marauding abominations of the Gray Waste.
- ◆ Imps and quasits — small but insidious variations on fiendish themes.
- ◆ Larvae — the writhing clay from which baatezu and tanar'ri spring.
- ◆ Night hags — wretched crones that peddle evil to both sides of the Blood War.
- ◆ Shadow fiends — creatures of darkness that steal a berk's very mind.
- ◆ Tieflings — the plane-touched descendants of mortal-fiend couplings.

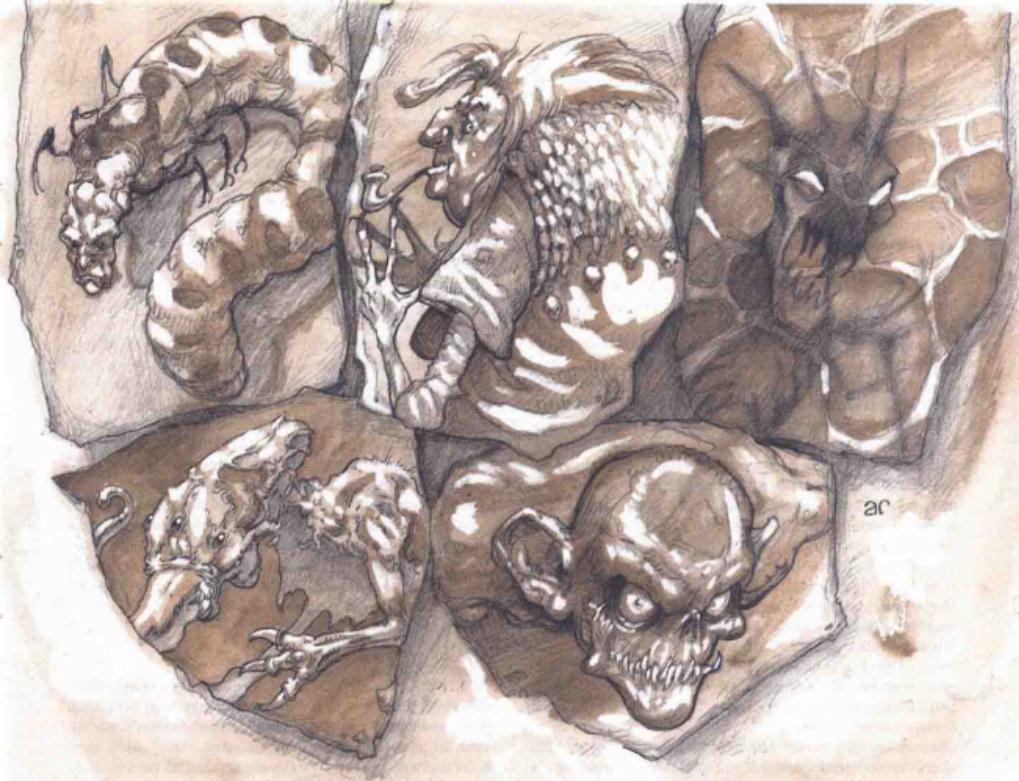
Some of these creatures, like the larvae, imps, and quasits, can go on to become real fiends. Others will never be more than what they are. But only the hordlings are considered true fiends, just like the baatezu, tanar'ri, yugoloths, and gehreleths. The others are, at best, merely fiendish.

But watch yourself carefully, berk: That doesn't make them any less vile.

— Ice the Thrice-Born

OTHERS

THERE IS MORE
+@ +THEIR VILLAINY
+HAN MEETS +HE EYE.
— A PRIME SAGE,
MORE CORRECT +HAN
SHE KNOWS



◆ BODAKS ◆

Michil Kedell

I know this will be difficult for some of you to believe (goodness knows, it was hard for me at first!), but there are certain places in the Abyss where even the tanar'i fear to tread, places of mind- and body-altering power that can twist and warp even the mightiest of beings. The Guvners warn against such places, and the tanar'i encourage their enemies to meet them there for battles, hoping their foes will be foolish enough to show up. Friend, these spots spawn such horrific sights and maddening stenches and untamed energies that only a complete leatherhead would ever go there.

Naturally, that means there'll always be "inquisitive" mortals who want to see what the fuss is all about. These are the stuff of which bodaks are made.

You see, when a mortal in the Abyss goes where she shouldn't (and where exactly *should* one go in the Abyss?), the terrorizing force of the plane pours into her like a savage sea, leaving her a blasted shell with hardly a fragment of mind left. Those who are truly lucky are killed immediately. Those not so fortunate become bodaks, a word that means "the unfinished dead" in the tongue of the lesser tanar'i. They're transmuted and transformed into creatures of evil, their minds and their memories wiped clean by the power of the Abyss. Bodaks clumsily prowl the plane (though nothing prevents them from stumbling through a portal and terrorizing the lands of good folk as well), attacking any creatures they see in the horror and hope that they can be freed by the oblivion of death.

I should point out, though, that some reports from lower-planar mercenaries note that fallen comrades *have* risen again as bodaks even when in completely "normal" areas of the Abyss (whatever *that* means). Sometimes, it seems, the chaotic energies align in just the right way — or the wrong way, if you ask me.

PHYSIOLOGY

Bodaks have a distorted and hunched humanoid shape, with skull-like faces and elongated fingers. Their rough skin is gray and completely hairless, and their large, cold white eyes have no pupils (goodness, but determining *that* must have cost a few brave sods their lives!). The monsters retain just a tiny fraction of their old features, and they often possess the smallest trace of their old mannerisms.

GENDER AND BIRTH. Sadly, any mortal who takes a wrong turn in the Abyss can become a bodak. That means any gender is possible among the creatures. I myself have read "documented" cases of bodaks mating with mortals, and though most of those were later revealed to be hoaxes (as I suspected all along), that doesn't mean that bodaks cannot produce offspring. Still, unless bodak tenaciously clings to the idea of its former gender (some bodaks have the most *amazing* wills!), the creature is utterly sexless and without the desire to procreate. The most sensitive sages believe the monsters hate their lives so much that they'd never wish the fate on another. But could any creature of chaos and evil ever feel such compassion? Would that it were true, friends, would that it were true.

REST AND NOURISHMENT. Bodaks do come to rest, but they don't sleep long (would you, in the Abyss?) — just enough to heal up whatever damage they took from their last fight. Then they shamble on. If they eat, it's beyond the knowledge of most folks; no bodak has ever been seen consuming anything. Perhaps they survive on the life forces they drain with their gazes.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES. The most feared ability of a bodak is its dreaded death gaze — if you get too close and look the creature in the eye, there's a good chance that you'll simply die. (Should this befall you in the Abyss, I'm afraid that you, too, will become a bodak.) Their bodies are tough but not *too* tough, harmed only by weapons of mild enchantment or cold-wrought iron — silver weapons do nothing. Perhaps because they spend so much of their lives in darkness, bodaks can also spy body heat at a great distance (three times farther than an elf!).

But darkness is a curse as well as a blessing. You see, a bodak that finds itself in the sunlight slowly withers and dies — for good. Thus, the best way to get rid of a bodak is to lure it out into a large field, or, better yet, a desert (in daylight, of course). But if you want to prepare against bodaks in the Abyss, carry flasks of acid and outfit yourself (or your spell-slinging friends) with *magic missiles* — both work well. Otherwise, try cold, magical fire, and gas, but don't be surprised if those attacks don't work as well as they should. Poison, nonmagical flames, and lightning have no effect whatsoever, and neither do the spells *charm*, *hold*, *sleep*, and *slow*. (Bodaks may be immune to other mind- and body-altering magic, but, as you might expect, it's quite difficult to conduct this sort of research.)

DEATH. Bodaks don't hurl themselves over cliffs or run themselves through with magical blades, but the creatures do seem to welcome death when it comes. Of course, as detailed above, it takes more than the usual swordplay or spellslinging to give it to them. If you should be so lucky as to slay a bodak, be aware that some folks think you must perform one of the following actions to prevent it from coming back to life, angrier than ever: sprinkle holy water on its corpse, expose its body to the light of a sun, or (worst of all!) devour the thing completely (or persuade some other creature to do it for you).

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

If this were a blank line on a Guvner's form, I could simply write "None" and be done with it. Bodaks have no beliefs (except, perhaps, for the notion that sentience is a curse), no society, and no culture. They hate each other as much as they hate all other life, and in the rare event that a mortal might see two bodaks together (the monsters are not that common, even in the vast Abyss), it's even rarer that the pair would work together at all.

Now, certainly some bodaks do manage to retain bits of their mortal thoughts and memories, so it's possible that one who lived a life of good works and noble deeds might have small inklings of kindness or cooperation. But most bodaks can't hold onto more than a faint mannerism or two — not nearly enough to make a difference.

MEETING A BODAK

Bodaks are grim and malignant creatures. They rarely speak, unless it's to offer curses or imprecations (and even then they growl in the yelping language of the lesser tanar'ri). Without pausing to parley, bodaks lurch close to their enemies and swing. They attack on sight, and though they rarely hurry, they move with a determined steadfastness that strikes fear into even the stoutest heart. Bodaks also use their death gazes as soon as they can, trying to drop whoever's unlucky enough to meet their stare (and it's difficult, friend, to fight a bodak — or indeed anything! — without looking at it).

As I mentioned above, there's a slight chance that a bodak will see something in its foes that gives it pause. This is your chance to run, and run quickly! If possible, try to flee past some *other* creature that might then occupy the bodak's attention (but be certain the thing truly deserves the gruesome fate you are handing it).

Of course, a benign bodak — one that fully recalls its former life — will usually do whatever it can to help mortals who find themselves trapped in the Abyss. But even these bodaks can speak only in halting, nearly incomprehensible words. If given the right incentive, benign bodaks can act as guides or guardians through the horrors of the plane.



◆ HORDLINGS ◆

Regnus Roy

The Gray Waste's got more hordlings than Ysgard's got warriors — and a body who's been to Ysgard knows just how many that means. The teeming masses swarm over the Waste and spill onto the neighboring Lower Planes, where they provide amusement, entertainment, and sometimes panic for the berks there. Graybeards say no two hordlings are alike, that their forms are endlessly varied. From what I've seen and heard, that's a power's own truth.

Here's the chant: Hordlings are formed from petitioners, folks who devoted their mortal lives to the pursuit of neutral evil. When these sods pass into the dead-book, they're consigned to the Gray Waste to live out eternity as larvae (unless they're later molded into new fiends or simply absorbed into the essence of the plane).

Every basher knows that the Waste drains a body of emotion, desire, and purpose. Some petitioners, though, can toss off the despair of the plane, just like a regular strong-willed cutter, and keep their fierce desire for individuality. They nurture the hate or envy that brought 'em to the Waste in the first place, and their emotions twist 'em into new shapes: hordlings.

There's no telling what horrid new form they'll settle in or what weird powers they'll have once all's said and done. Every hatred is different, and every petty jealousy and deep-seated resentment has its own unique influence. The shapes of the hordlings are truly awful, and they all reflect the inner torment of the brain-box inside the shell. What's worse, hordlings don't get promoted into new forms like the other fiends; they're stuck with whatever they get.

'Course, all the shapes're well-suited to rending, snapping, and tearing. Fighting and eating are about the only things the miserable hordlings do well.

PHYSIOLOGY

How can a body make general comments about a race when every single member's different from every other? Gender? Well, some hordlings have one or the other, some have neither, and some have both. Do the ugly little things breed? Who knows? Chant is that hordling-descended tieflings lurk about in remote places of the Waste, but there's really no way to tell. If these tieflings do exist, they're most likely exceedingly rare, 'cause hordlings take their greatest pleasure in killing and devouring any berk that stands in their way — even other hordlings.

As for their powers and weaknesses, well, it's doubtful a building the size of Sigil's Civic Festhall could hold all the books it'd take to describe 'em. Some hordlings, no doubt, would fall over from a good strong sneeze. Others regenerate even if they lose their heads. Some spit fire or toxic dust or streams of caustic acid. (Some turn *into* caustic acid, for powers' sake!) Some burn at the merest touch of light, while others glow with an inner radiance. No, the only similarity the hordlings have is that they're all so sodding different.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Though they travel in huge packs across the Gray Waste, the hordlings have no culture to speak of. They produce nothing of value, though sometimes an overeager baatezu or tanar'i tries to press a group of 'em into a Blood War army. But the hordlings're harder to control than manes, and that's saying a lot. They're far too undisciplined to take any sort of commands, and they don't seem to be afraid of anything, so they just do whatever they please.

Chant is there's a village someplace on the Gray Waste where a few dozen hordlings have managed to overcome their hatreds. Supposedly, they've built up some sort of defense against the despair of the plane and're slowly purging themselves of evil. If it's true, it'll be an interesting experiment: Will they keep their shapes, or will they turn back into larvae — or even their original mortal forms? 'Course, it probably ain't true, but just some night hag's way of luring curious sods down to the Waste.

MEE+ING A HORDLING

There ain't much to a hordling's personality. They're ravening beasts, bent only on destruction and devouring. They can be as clever as a human or as pox-brained as a lemmur, but they generally recognize weakness — and they fall on a berk who shows it first chance they get. Hordlings are totally unruly, in other words, and a body shouldn't expect to deal with one unless he's got protective magic and a powerful blade.

'Course, what's it mean to deal with a hordling? There's no standard hordling tongue, so unless a cutter's lucky enough to find one that can speak an understandable language, any exchange'll be short. A blood who uses some sort of mental communication like telepathy finds a hordling's mind cluttered with persistent anger and burning hatred. As with a bodak, the best way to deal with a hordling is to avoid it.

◆ IMPS AND QUASIS ◆

Xanxost

Hello again, mortals! Xanxost is here to tell you now about imps and quasits. Sand quasits? They are easier to kill than tanar'i but they do not taste quite as good. That is the most important lesson: The best meals take some work.

The Lower Planes are full of larvae. Not all of the worm-things get tossed into a lich's larder or shaped into the bully-fiends of the baatezu and tanar'i. Some of them are brought instead to the attention of greater fiends and twisted into new and interesting forms. Xanxost twisted a larva once. It squealed and ripped into pieces. But when a baatezu twists a larva in just the right baatezu way, it becomes an imp. Tanar'i get quasits.

The poor imps, like most creatures under the control of the baatezu, the cursed lawful baatezu, the hated —

The poor imps are rigidly regulated and watched over by their baatezu masters. When a lawful evil priest or wizard is judged "worthy," the fiends may make a gift of an imp to that poor basher. Oho! It is no good gift! From that point on, the imp starts to corrupt the mortal and drag his heart, inch by inch, closer to the grasp of the baatezu.

Quasits do the same thing for the tanar'ri, though their masters don't work together in any grand scheme to draw in victims. A marilith or vrock or balor or nalfeshnee or nabasu or hezrou or glabrezu or chasme or babau just sends a quasit to spread mischief on a prime-material world. If it can scrag a chaotic evil mortal here and there who is foolish enough to deal with the tanar'ri, good. If it just runs around and causes trouble, good.

Chant is imps that do well can be turned into baatezu, and quasits that do well might be made into tanar'ri. Personally, Xanxost would rather stay as an imp or a quasit than become a lemure or a manes. But if one of these little creatures is willing to start small and work up through the ranks, it could go far.

PHYSIOLOGY

Imps and quasits are about two feet tall, so they both run between your legs when you try to grab and eat them. Still, there are two easy ways to tell an imp from a quasit. First, an imp has wings and can fly; a quasit does not. Second, if you are stung by its tail and you die, you know it was an imp; all of a quasit's poison is in its claws. Third — three easy ways — an imp can change its shape into any two of these forms: large spider, raven, goat, or giant rat. A quasit can change itself into any two of these forms: bat, frog, wolf, or giant centipede.

If you see a *big* frog in the Abyss, it might be a hezrou, a hydroloth, a ballywug, or a slaad like Xanxost. If you see a big goat on Baator, it is just a big goat. Unless it is an arch-fiend.

GENDER AND BIRTH. Imps muddle through centuries of existence as neuter beings. When they have done enough good jobs to please their masters, they are assigned a gender according to the traits of their work. Why must the baatezu always do things the hard way? Quasits have whatever gender their tanar'ri creators and prime-material masters impose on them.

Xanxost already talked about how imps and quasits are made.

REST AND NOURISHMENT. Imps and quasits are usually too busy to sleep. Their fiend masters and their mortal masters always send them out to do evil things. Many imps and quasits do not care; they do not need sleep at all. But sometimes they get tired of running around and they hide in one of their animal shapes so they can rest somewhere.

Xanxost was hired once to find a quasit that had run away from the Abyss. It was hiding on the Outlands in frog

form, in the blood marshes outside the town of Torch. Xanxost planned to find it by asking each frog in the marshes: "Are you a quasit?" Xanxost knew that the frog that did not answer would be the quasit, trying to hide. Those marshes had *many* quasits.

As far as food goes, both imps and quasits eat whatever they can get, as long as it is meat. The creatures do not care if the meat is alive or dead, or if it has been steeped in fear or gehreleth slime. It just has to be meat. Xanxost is so hungry.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES. Both imps and quasits have poison in their bodies. An imp's is much more deadly; a lucky imp can even take out a dragon with a well-placed sting. Xanxost bets it could even take out a slaad! A quasit's poison just causes a victim to itch and burn and be clumsy for a few minutes.

When the baatezu and tanar'ri twist larvae into imps and quasits, they wring a few special powers into

their new servants. All

imps and quasits can tell

when good-aligned things

or magical things are nearby,

and they can turn invisible to hide

from anything that worries them. Also,

imps can talk other berks into doing things,

and quasits can make those same berks run away instead.

To kill imps and quasits, do not try to burn or freeze or shock them; they love fire, cold, and lightning. Believe it or not, these puny creatures are almost as hardy as a red slaad when it comes to shrugging off spells. Use magical weapons instead. Or use silver weapons on quasits and cold-wrought iron on imps.

Wait, do that the other way around. Anyway, both creatures also regenerate from wounds. But Xanxost will say this: No imp or quasit has ever regenerated out of a slaadi stomach!

DEATH. If slain off their home planes, imps and quasits just reform back home after a year and a day. But if you kill an imp on Baator or a quasit in the Abyss, they are blasted into eternal oblivion — which is right where Xanxost wishes they would stay.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

These creatures do not really have a society. Imps fit in with whatever plans their baatezu masters dream up, and they follow these schemes to the best of their abilities. They may be weak and low, but they are smart enough to know that they had better do what they are told. That is the only way they can advance.

A quasit works directly under a single tanar'ric master and has to do its bidding. If it gets the chance, it tries to escape. Of course, all quasits know now not to hide in the blood marshes of Torch! Those that flee realize that they have no future with the tanar'ri, and they figure they are the best berks to decide how to spend their lives.

Two things are most important of all. First, both imps

and quasits realize that they have sidestepped one of the most dangerous things about being a larva. By accepting the changes thrust upon them, they avoid being turned into lemures, manes, or other fodder for the Blood War.

Second . . . Xanxost forgot what the second thing was.

MEETING AN IMP OR QUASIT

Like most small infernal creatures, imps and quasits act weak to tough berks and tough to weak ones. What Xanxost means to say: To those they serve, they are ingratiating and endlessly helpful. But they lord their little might over any sods unfortunate enough to come under their power.

Most of them (especially imps) are also very concerned about their potential advancement. If you offer one a hand up on the food chain, you might earn its loyalty, at least for a small time. But oho! These alliances don't last long, and if you count that they will, you might as well count yourself right into the dead-book, because that's exactly where the little horrors would like to put you, mortal.

◆ LARVAE ◆

Rezzik Tam

When mortals who stupidly and selfishly followed the path of evil die, their spirits appear on the Lower Planes, transformed into larvae for their transgressions. These squirming, wormlike monstrosities — hideous petitioners, really — can appear anywhere. Lawful evil mortals become larvae on stinking Baator; chaotic evil fools suffer in the Abyss. And those who were simply evil, with no care for either law or chaos? They reform on one of the other Lower Planes — usually, the Gray Waste.

Good folks steer clear of the larvae, using them only to scare their children straight as examples of what fate befalls the wicked. But to horrors like fiends and liches, the larvae are the basic units of lower-planar currency. They serve as money, food, or new recruits for the armies of the Blood War. Larvae are, in short, untapped potential at its best. Night hags round them up on the Gray Waste and sell them to the highest or closest bidder, depending on how much the cronies need the jink or favors their disgusting customers promise them.

Oh, if only we could wipe all larvae from the Lower Planes! Many fiends and fiendish races would suffer then, that's for sure! Hordlings, imps, quasits, baatezu, and tanar'i all rise from the ranks of the larvae (though, admittedly, the baatezu and tanar'i do emerge from other sources as well). How do the fiends twist the worm-creatures into their new shapes? Even if I knew, I would not say. Some knowledge deserves to be lost to time.

PHYSIOLOGY

Larvae appear as slimy, sickly yellow worms that generally span about five or six feet in length. Their worst feature, though, is their heads, which have twisted and malformed features that faintly echo their former mortal faces. Larvae also exude a noxious stench that doesn't get any sweeter no matter how long the creatures are around. They have no obvious gender; since they don't mate to reproduce, they don't seem to feel that need. They eat each other and whatever's unlucky enough to fall in their path.

Planewalkers who cross the Gray Waste report seeing huge clumps of larvae just lying around motionless — as if it weren't easy enough already for night hags to catch the

creatures! When larvae do move, they leave trails of slime in their wake. But they usually wriggle only when prodded by their cackling herders, who sear the larvae with hot branding irons to make them slime along.

What good are larvae? Why do fiends and liches care about buying them from the hags? Well, most larvae are eaten or sacrificed, their energies consumed for whatever arcane rituals their new masters can think up. Larvae that aren't so lucky get reshaped into other, still more horrible forms. The creatures are the tabula rasa of the Lower Planes, the blank slates on which almost anything can be written and become true. A lowly larvae can eventually become a pit fiend or a balor — but only one in a million moves on from the life of a squirming grub, and most of them die at the lowest levels of fiendish society. Still, at least that chance is better than outright destruction.

Reports coming in from Baator say that the baatezu are purchasing more and more larvae from night hags — an incredible amount, in fact. A spy warned that the fiends plan to perform some sort of ritual with the creatures' life forces to destroy the tanar'i or give themselves a new power that will make them unbeatable. Hah! It's hard to see how *anything* could swing the Blood War one way or another. But fiends are foul creatures, remember. If they're desperate enough, they'll try anything.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Society? Culture? You must be joking! Larvae lie around. They get herded. They get sold. They squirm when you poke them, and they bite you if you're not careful. What else is there to say about them?

Still, the things are — just barely — above animal intelligence. Some scholars who've studied the larvae say they have a crude language made up of body movement. Hah! They might as well just say the larvae wriggle and roll over one another — it all looks the same to the rest of us. Some of the larvae rise to the top of the pile. Some sink to the bottom. Some bite others. Sometimes they move on their own, but not usually. That doesn't sound like much of a language to me.

◆ NIGHT HAGS ◆

Telson Splithorn

Of all the creatures of the Lower Planes, the night hags're probably one of the most underrated and overlooked. And the why of it's completely dark to me. As suppliers and herders of the larvae across the Gray Waste, hags're one of the great "economic" powers of the Lower Planes. But the fiends often dismiss 'em as simple merchants.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Sure, maybe the machinations of night hags don't reach as far as, say, the plots of the yugoloths, but hags're some of the most influential bloods of the Lower Planes. They're the top of the pecking order of the natives of the Gray Waste, that's for sure. [Course, that's mainly because the yugoloths all moved to Gehenna, and any other tougher bashers keep out of sight.]

See, the hags don't forget slights easily, and they've no compunction about wasting years hunting a berk down for any wrong done to 'em, no matter how slight. Small wonder, then, that they've risen to their current status as the real merchants of the Lower Planes — they've done their level best to destroy the competition.

PHYSIOLOGY

Horrid creatures whose features vaguely resemble the most wizened (and ugly) of mortal crones, night hags stand about five feet tall. Their skin's a nauseating purple-blue in color, their hair darkest ebony, and their eyes a bitter, glowing red. Their claws protrude like hooks, and their fanged teeth rock loosely in their gums.

Don't misunderstand, berk — hags might look frail, but they're powerful opponents, both magically and physically. After all, they've got enough might to earn the respect of pit fiends, balors, and liches. That alone should be a telltale sign for most bashers to deal with 'em carefully, if at all.

GENDER AND BIRTH. All night hags are female. They occasionally take a powerful fiend high-up (of any race, as long as it has some kind of noble status) as a husband. The children of this mating are invariably female, invariably hags. It's said that, now and again, night hags take a more seductive guise than their usual and trick mortals into helping 'em propagate the hag race.

Where did the first hags come from? No one knows. The latest theory making the rounds of Sigil says they arose from larvae, that they were mortals with too much hatred to become mere hordlings. If that tale's true, that'd make the hags real fiends. It'd also make a body wonder why the crones *sell* larvae rather than turn 'em into new hags themselves. Do they have some method of raising and controlling a young hag that doesn't work on one that comes from a larva? Or is it just that mortals today don't have the capacity for hatred they did in the old days? (Any planar alive'll tell you what he thinks of *that* idea.)

REST AND NOURISHMENT. No one's ever caught a night hag sleeping. But the crones withdraw, certainly, and perhaps they go through a period where they lie vulnerable. But if so, they protect themselves so well that they're basically unapproachable.

Unfortunately, what night hags eat ain't so much of a mystery; they're seen snacking on fresh larvae plucked from their herds. But chant says they also devour dreams and hopes. As creatures of the Gray Waste, that certainly seems likely.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES. The night hags ain't the toughest bashers on the Gray Waste, but they're among the most stubborn. They refuse to let insults drop, and they never let themselves get peeled by anyone. If they deal with someone who's weaker than they are, they usually track the berk down later and turn him into a larva. Fact is, they can even ride a mortal sod's dreams and drain his health away until he's just part of a wriggling herd on the Waste.

Hags' too smart to let their brain-boxes be addled. Magic like *charm*, *sleep*, and *fear* won't even slow 'em down. They're also immune to fire and cold, though a good smack with a weapon'll usually make a hag sit up and take notice. 'Course, not just any weapon'll do — it's got to be highly enchanted, or at least made of silver or cold-wrought iron.

DEATH. It's thought that a dead night hag simply dies. If something special happens, no one knows what it is. 'Course, with all the power night hags have, it's far easier to talk about killing 'em than to actually do it.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

There's precious little society for night hags to be a part of. They compete against each other as well as outsiders, and they don't feel any particular loyalty to any race — not even their own. It seems even hags're somehow afflicted by the apathy of the Waste. Still, they do worship Ceglinne, the greatest hag of 'em all. Chant has it she's just a night hag who's far more powerful than the rest of 'em, but she certainly holds her own as a power.

Night hags're an important link in the chain of the Lower Planes. They herd vast armies of larvae across the planes, culling the worst and selling the choicest to fiends, liches, and other creatures that require life forces. Fact is, hags're somehow able to tell the good larvae from the bad quick as a wink; that's why their customers depend on 'em. And one reason they harvest mostly on the Gray Waste is that the plane's larvae are all neutral evil, which are easily adapted by both baatezu and tanar'ri. (If the hags sold larvae that already leaned toward law or chaos, they'd be cutting off half their business — fiends find it too hard to evolve larvae that have "unworkable" alignments.)

The hags often ride nightmares, summon lesser fiends as servants, and hire mercenaries (evil ones, of course; hags attack any good folks they think they can kill) as guards on the more dangerous treks. That's about the extent of their involvement with society.

MEE+ING A NIGHT HAG

Most hags're good to their word, if a body can get 'em to give it in the first place. They don't keep their pacts out of honor; they do it because their livelihood depends on it. Not even a fiend'd trust a night hag known to sell bad larvae or back out of deals.

'Course, trying to conduct business with a night hag's a sodding bad idea for anyone. They're petty, vicious, cruel, and scheming. They've always got a peal running somehow, and they seek harsh revenge if they're peeled in turn. So don't try to trick 'em. If you can't put a hag in the dead-book, try to buy her off with magic, knowledge, or larvae — hags prize those things above all else.



◆ SHADOW FIENDS ◆

Nomoto Sinh

Shadow fiends are apparently a race unto themselves, though some bloods cling to an odd theory that the creatures grow from manes gone wrong. What nonsense! The sheer intelligence of the shadow fiends puts that notion to rest, never mind the fact that they seem to be made of the essence of darkness. Thus, despite their name, they share nothing with true fiends other than a reputation for frightening atrocities.

Hollows of shadow fiends blot the Lower Planes, though they're most common in the Abyss, Carceri, and the Gray Waste. Lone shadow fiends wander the Great Ring and appear on any of the Outer Planes, though they also travel to the Prime in search of minds ripe for stealing.

Some sages put forth that the shadow fiends are actually proxies of evil powers, the lower-planar equivalents of solars. The truth of this is dark, but a few wicked priests have boasted that their deities send shadow fiends on missions. Of course, even if the priests spoke true, perhaps said fiends were merely promised minds or power in exchange for a one-time service. Who knows what goes on when we aren't there to see it?

PHYSIOLOGY

Shadow fiends are said to be built out of the stuff of darkness itself, their slender forms shaped from shadow and given life by the force of pure evil. These monsters of corporeal gloom are skeletal in appearance, as if they're fiends that have had the flesh stripped from their bones. Their fingers and toes are cruel hooks, their eyes empty pools of white space. Terrible beings to behold, shadow fiends are few and far between, which unfortunately also means they don't lend themselves to close study.

GENDER AND BIRTH. The entire race appears to be neuter in gender. It's thought that they reproduce by obtaining the raw force of evil magic and shaping it with arcane rituals

into new shadow fiends. Of course, like so much else about these creatures, exactly *how* this occurs is not known.

REST AND NOURISHMENT. When a shadow fiend wants to rest, it simply loses itself in pure darkness. When there is no light to cast a shadow, the creature can just fade into inky blackness and relax. Do they actually sleep, or do they simply cease all movement until they recover whatever energy they've expended? Once again, we don't know. But one thing is certain: Deprive a shadow fiend of its recovery time, and it grows a bit weaker.

That also might be due to the possibility that the fiends actually *subsist* on darkness and shadow. However, now and again the creatures do consume the minds they harvest from mortals — but only those that prove too weak to command a good price on the trading blocks.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES. Though a shadow fiend has wings, it cannot actually fly. Its wings are useful only for slowing a fall or helping the creature to spring a great distance. They like to surprise a foe by leaping onto it and rending it with all four claws. Once the poor sod is shaken by this initial attack, the fiend tries to snatch his mind and stuff it into a dark gem for safekeeping, leaving the victim's husk to wither and rot.

The fiends can also create magical darkness around themselves and send their opponents away shrieking in magically induced terror. Furthermore, shadow fiends are un hindered by fire, cold, and lightning.

On the other hand, the monsters do have their weak spots. Simple torches or *light* spells cause them pain, and stronger stuff like sunlight or *continual light* spells makes them much easier to strike and wound. They can even be turned by clerics.

DEATH. If a shadow fiend is slain, it's thought to be forever dead. We've all heard the rumors that the monsters can use their stolen minds to somehow reform, but if this occurs, how could we tell? Even to a trained eye, all shadow fiends look alike, with only minute differences. As always, the best advice when dealing with fiendish creatures is to sprinkle a corpse with holy water.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Like the gehreleths, the shadow fiends seem to have an absolute prohibition against killing each other. And, also like the gehreleths, they have no compunction about slaying members of any other race. But their purpose isn't simple destruction; they live to capture the minds of mighty and knowledgeable mortals. They store their prizes in gems and trade them for powerful magic, which they use to shape more of their kind. You'd be surprised — and alarmed — to hear just how many different creatures on the Lower Planes are interested in buying these stolen minds, using them as food, trophies, and bar-

gaining chips for their *own* trades.) Thus, the trading system of the shadow fiends supports their entire race.

On the Lower Planes, the fiends cluster in eerie hollows near tiny gates and portals. Their structures are shaped from pure darkness and rise high into the air, supported by nothing but willpower. Shadow fiends possess a highly developed sense of the aesthetic, and they enjoy making sculptures from the gloom.

Though it has long been thought that shadow fiends have no language, researchers have recently discovered a kind of telepathy among the creatures that lets them communicate with any sentient being. Of course, a message sent by a shadow fiend sears one's mind like pure evil. Its mental voice is smooth and insinuating, hiding a great darkness behind the words. It's like listening to a voice emanating from a well.

M E E T I N G A SHAD O W F I E N D

A shadow fiend won't automatically try to kill everything it meets, as do so many of the other lower-planar races. If a cutter is smart, the fiend might just try to take his mind. If a cutter is *really* clever, he might figure out a way to give the monster what it wants and still walk away in one piece. Of course, the best way to protect yourself against a shadow fiend is to avoid acting powerful or exceptionally knowledgeable. Bluff and bluster may impress or cow many creatures of the Lower Planes, but those tactics fail miserably against shadow fiends.

◆ TIEFLINGS ◆ *Enkillo the Sly*

Being a tiefling myself, I suppose I'm in a sodding good position to write about those who find their lineage touched — or tainted, take your pick — by the denizens of the Lower Planes. Sure, there's a remarkable range to the way we look and act, but something, somewhere, always gives the game away.

See, somewhere way back in our past, one of our ancestors dallied with a fiend — or with a human. Again, take your pick. The result was a half-breed. Well, when a half-bred fiend mates with a mortal, the result is a quarter-breed — a tiefling. Truth is, tieflings're quarter-breeds at *most*. When a body moves down the line a dozen generations, little of the original fiend's left in the descendants. Still, fiendish blood is powerful, and it shows through in strange ways.

P H Y S I O L O G Y

The signs of a tiefling's fiendish heritage're usually subtle: small horns, a tail, crimson skin, bony teeth, strangely curved ears, a glowing cast to the eye — the list goes on and on. These clues ain't foolproof, though; only a leatherhead thinks that every berk with horns is a tiefling. Ol' Enkillo doesn't have horns at all.

We tieflings also tend to be a bit slimmer and more attractive than your average mortal. We're not brawny, and

we rely far more on our quick wits and quicker reflexes to get ourselves out of jams.

GENDER AND BIRTH. Tieflings can be of either gender, or none, or both. There's a broad range of possibilities open to us, and we experiment whenever we can (a story for another time). That's how we know that we're compatible with most other humanoid races. And, after a while, our fiendish blood is diluted enough that our children's children's children might become pure — but that takes a long, long time.

REST AND NOURISHMENT. For rest, tieflings are pretty much like any ordinary basher. We've got good endurance, but we get tired. It's our mortal heritage. As for food, we prefer meat — the rarer the better. But we can survive on insects, ashes, or even minerals for a short while, if need be. We're nothing if not adaptable.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES. This is where our ancestry comes into play, because any tiefling could have any number of strange powers, quirks, or vulnerabilities. I've seen it all in my day. But I've also seen enough to know that most tieflings can see body heat about as well as an elf and wrap themselves in darkness like a cloak. Cold doesn't affect us as much as it would an ordinary berk, and we're more resistant to fire, lightning, and poison.

DEATH. When we're killed, we die. Anywhere. Period. We can be raised from the dead, but to tell the truth, we don't count on anyone to do us the favor.

S O C I E T Y A N D C U L T U R E

Tiefling society? Pike that! If anything can be said with assurance about tieflings, it's that we're loners. We're distrusted and viewed as evil malcontents for so long that we start to believe it ourselves. It's hard not to try to live up to the hype, eh?

That's why tieflings are peery and solitary. Just imagine having the lesson that you're evil and bound to come to no good end pounded into your head from your very earliest memories. Picture being the butt of pranks, having all the blame for dirty tricks placed on you even if you had nothing to do with 'em — and then try to imagine being a forgiving, gentle person.

On occasion, tieflings of note attract younger tieflings, cutters who want to learn how to survive in a multiverse that doesn't seem to want 'em. That's about as much society as a tiefling's ever likely to have, and about as much as he'll ever want. And as for culture, lots of us move into artistic endeavors later in life, hoping to express our rage at the injustice of the multiverse. Like most other things we try, we're sodding good at it, too. *

Fact is, despite all the cosmos throws at us, tieflings're pretty tough. In the end, it's how we feel about ourselves that counts, anyway.

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ACCESSORY

Faces of Evil: the FIENDS

by Colin McComb

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT FIENDS
(BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK).

I've seen it happen too many times. A berk finds out how much damage it takes to kill a fiend and figures that's all he needs. Then he heads off to the Lower Planes — and is never heard from again. When will these leatherheads learn? The fiends aren't just lists of numbers. They're creatures that think, eat, dream, breed, struggle, and evolve — in short, creatures that live. They're part of a larger society of political treachery and desperate survival, a culture of disturbing aesthetics and violent beliefs. And only a blood who studies it all has a hope of ducking the fiends, defeating them — or just understanding them.

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